



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



WEDNESDAY — 16 MAR 2022

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## Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	03/16 Unprecedented breakthrough infections
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/how-omicron-fueled-an-unprecedented-wave-of-breakthrough-infections-in-wa/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/how-omicron-fueled-an-unprecedented-wave-of-breakthrough-infections-in-wa/</a>
GIST	<p>When the first COVID-19 vaccines began to arrive in Washington more than a year ago, the jubilation was evident. People traveled far at first to find a hard-to-come-by shot, with a hope that the end of the pandemic, or at least its deadliness, was near.</p> <p>For those inoculated against the coronavirus, it was fairly uncommon to later test positive. Then the variants hit.</p> <p>These so-called “breakthrough” infections started popping up throughout the country last summer. As vaccination rates climbed and infections persisted, concern grew. At the time, the delta variant was overwhelming the region’s health care systems. Then the highly infectious omicron variant landed in the state and breakthrough cases nearly doubled.</p> <p>By the end of January, Washington state had reported 342,195 breakthrough infections. About 75% of those had occurred within the prior two months.</p> <p>“With 85% of eligible people in [King County] completing their primary vaccination series and with the more infectious omicron variant, we saw more people getting infected who were vaccinated as well,” King County’s health officer, Dr. Jeff Duchin, said during a news briefing last week.</p> <p>“But this does not mean the vaccines are not working,” he added. “Although vaccination doesn’t always prevent against infection, it does provide measurable protection.”</p> <p>According to <a href="#">the state Department of Health</a>, about 19% of people with breakthrough infections reported symptoms, while about 2% were hospitalized. Less than 0.5% died.</p> <p>Unvaccinated COVID patients, meanwhile, are five to seven times more likely to be hospitalized because of the virus, depending on age.</p> <p>The health department identifies a COVID case as a “breakthrough” if the person had received the last dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine or the Johnson &amp; Johnson vaccine at least 14 days before testing positive. The agency doesn’t currently include boosters or additional doses in its definition.</p> <p>DOH noted that some people might have become sick soon after vaccination or right before vaccination, when the body hadn’t had time to fully build protection.</p> <p>“The change in breakthrough rates is likely due to a combination of factors, including the fact that when omicron arrived, the vast majority of our population was fully vaccinated,” said Gabriel Spitzer, spokesperson for Public Health — Seattle &amp; King County. “As more people are vaccinated, we expect a higher proportion of cases to occur among vaccinated people. For example, if everyone were vaccinated, all cases would be breakthroughs.”</p>

The jump in cases could also be attributed to possible waning immunity, local changes in mitigation recommendations or different coronavirus variants circulating simultaneously, according to DOH's [most recent report on breakthrough infections](#), released last week.

Public health officials have reminded residents that while breakthrough infections are possible with any vaccine, vaccinations and boosters still help prevent severe illness and hospitalization.

Detailed data comparing breakthrough infections during the delta wave to those during the omicron wave is limited, but a team of University of Washington researchers recently found that many of last year's breakthrough cases induced very strong antibody responses, said Lexi Walls, a UW biochemical researcher who helped lead the [study](#).

"But getting boosted is the best thing you can do to not only protect yourself against infection, but also protect against severe outcomes from delta and omicron," said Walls, who has studied coronaviruses for more than five years. "Even though they're wildly different from what you've been vaccinated with, which is the original SARS-CoV-2 strain."

Breakthrough infections were also more common among younger people, state data shows, with the bulk of cases reported among those 20-49. While the age distribution has changed over time as more age groups became eligible for vaccines, breakthrough infections are significantly less common among people over 65.

Since last fall, when the state began collecting reinfection data, more than 32,950 Washingtonians reported a reinfection, with more than 90% recorded after omicron surged through Western Washington.

State researchers have since found that omicron is responsible for four to eight times as many COVID reinfections, compared to delta reinfections.

Of those reinfected, about 2% were hospitalized and 0.2% died, [according to DOH](#).

The health department attributed the rise in reinfections to an increase in the number of people with a "primary" infection, the spread of the omicron variant and waning immunity.

Reinfections were more common among younger people, with most cases reported among 18-to-34-year-olds, the report said. People over 65 with reinfections were most likely to be hospitalized.

"Differences in testing due to workplace requirements, access to testing, and personal preferences regarding testing may be impacting reported reinfections by age," DOH said in its report. Age-specific differences in vaccination behaviors and chronic diseases might have also had an impact, the report said.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/16 Russia intensifies Ukraine bombing</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.newsmax.com/headline/russia-ukraine-war-zelenskyy-congress/2022/03/16/id/1061387/">https://www.newsmax.com/headline/russia-ukraine-war-zelenskyy-congress/2022/03/16/id/1061387/</a>
GIST	<p>Ukraine's president was preparing to make a direct appeal for more help in a rare speech by a foreign leader to the U.S. Congress, even as Russia continued its bombardment of the Ukrainian capital Wednesday.</p> <p>In the war's third week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy suggested there was still some reason to be optimistic that negotiations with the Russian government might yet yield an agreement.</p> <p>Previewing his speech to the U.S. Congress, Zelenskyy thanked President Joe Biden and "all the friends of Ukraine" for \$13.6 billion in new support. He appealed for more weapons and more sanctions to punish Russia and repeated his call to "close the skies over Ukraine to Russian missiles and planes."</p>

Zelenskyy said Russia's demands were becoming "more realistic" after their delegations met Tuesday via video. The sides were expected to speak again later Wednesday.

"Efforts are still needed, patience is needed," he said in his video address to the nation. "Any war ends with an agreement."

He said Russian forces had been unable to move deeper into Ukrainian territory but had continued their heavy shelling of cities.

Developments on the diplomatic front and on the ground occurred as the number of people fleeing Ukraine amid Europe's heaviest fighting since World War II eclipsed 3 million.

Zelenskyy said 28,893 civilians were able to flee through nine humanitarian corridors in the past day although the Russians refused to allow aid into Mariupol.

Shrapnel from an artillery shell slammed into a 12-story apartment building in central Kyiv on Wednesday, obliterating the top floor and igniting a fire that sent plumes of smoke over the area, according to a statement and images released by the Kyiv emergencies agency. The neighboring building was also damaged. The agency reported two victims, without saying if they were injured or killed.

Also, a powerful explosion thundered overnight in Kharkiv that was heard across the eastern city.

In addition to airstrikes and shelling by ground forces, Russian naval ships fired overnight on a town south of Mariupol on the Azov Sea and another near Odesa on the Black Sea, according to local officials.

Russian forces have intensified fighting in the Kyiv suburbs, notably around the town of Bucha in the northwest and the highway leading west toward Zhytomyr, the head of the Kyiv region Oleksiy Kuleba said. He said Russian troops are trying to cut off the capital from transport arteries and destroy logistical capabilities even as they plan a wide-ranging attack to seize Kyiv.

Twelve towns around Kyiv are without water and six without heat.

Russia has occupied the city of Ivankiv, 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of Kyiv, and controls the surrounding region on the border with Belarus, Kuleba said.

Across the Kyiv region, he said, "Kindergartens, museums, churches, residential blocks and engineering infrastructure are suffering from the endless firing."

A senior U.S. defense official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the Pentagon's assessment, said Tuesday the Russians were using long-range fire to hit civilian targets inside Kyiv with increasing frequency but that their ground forces were making little to no progress around the country. The official said Russian troops were still about 15 kilometers (9 miles) from the center of the capital.

Before Tuesday's talks with Ukrainian officials, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow would press its demands that Ukraine drop its bid to join NATO, adopt a neutral status and "demilitarize."

In a statement that seemed to signal potential grounds for agreement with Moscow, Zelenskyy told European leaders gathered in London that he realizes NATO has no intention of accepting Ukraine.

"We have heard for many years about the open doors, but we also heard that we can't enter those doors," he said. "This is the truth, and we have simply to accept it as it is."

NATO does not admit nations with unsettled territorial conflicts. Zelenskyy has repeatedly said he realizes NATO isn't going to offer membership to Ukraine and that he could consider a neutral status for his country but needs strong security guarantees from both the West and Russia.

The U.N. said close to 700 civilians in Ukraine have been confirmed killed, with the true figure probably much higher.

On a day when thousands managed to leave Mariupol, Russian troops seized the city's largest hospital, regional leader Pavlo Kyrylenko said. He said the troops forced about 400 people from nearby homes into the Regional Intensive Care Hospital and were using them and roughly 100 patients and staff as human shields by not allowing them to leave.

Kyrylenko said shelling had already heavily damaged the hospital's main building, but medical staff have been treating patients in makeshift wards in the basement.

Doctors from other Mariupol hospitals made a video to tell the world about the horrors they've been seeing. "We don't want to be heroes and martyrs posthumously," one woman said. She also said it's insufficient to simply refer to people as the wounded: "It's torn off arms and legs, gouged out eyes, bodies torn into fragments, insides falling out."

The employee of Russian state television who was arrested after interrupting a live news program by protesting the war in Ukraine was fined about \$270, but still could face a prison sentence.

"These were very difficult days of my life because I literally went two full days without sleep, the interrogation lasted for more than 14 hours and they didn't allow me to contact my family and close friends, didn't provide any legal support," Marina Ovsyannikova said after she was released.

Ovsyannikova, an employee of Channel 1, walked into the studio during Monday's evening news show with a poster saying "stop the war, don't believe the propaganda, they are lying to you here." In English, it said "no war" at the top of the poster and "Russians against the war" at the bottom.

Two journalists working for Fox News were killed in a vehicle hit by fire Monday on the outskirts of Kyiv. Fox identified them as video journalist Pierre Zakrzewski and Ukrainian journalist Oleksandra "Sasha" Kuvshynova, who was helping Fox crews navigate the area. Another journalist was killed Sunday in Ukraine.

On Tuesday, the leaders of three European Union countries — Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia — visited Kyiv in a bold show of support amid the danger.

Fighting has intensified on Kyiv's outskirts, and the mayor imposed a curfew through Thursday morning. Tuesday's artillery strikes hit the Svyatoshynskyi district of western Kyiv.

"Yesterday we extinguished one fire, today another. It is very difficult," a firefighter who gave only his first name, Andriy, said outside a 15-story apartment building that was hit, tears falling from his eyes. "People are dying, and the worst thing is that children are dying. They haven't lived their lives and they have already seen this."

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HEADLINE	<b>03/16 TSA: 3,800 mask related incidents</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/tsa-has-investigated-more-than-3-800-mask-related-incidents-since-mandate-went-into-effect/ar-AAV7SUB">https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/tsa-has-investigated-more-than-3-800-mask-related-incidents-since-mandate-went-into-effect/ar-AAV7SUB</a>
GIST	<p>The Transportation Security Administration has investigated more than 3,800 incidents of potential violations involving the federal mask mandate, assessing more than \$644,000 in civil penalties, according to a report this week by the Government Accountability Office.</p> <p>The TSA, charged with enforcing the mandate in airports and other public transportation settings, has issued more than 2,700 warning notices, the report said. It issued civil penalties in about 900 instances, roughly 24 percent of cases that occurred between Feb. 2, 2021, and March 7, 2022.</p>

The average civil fine for violators was \$699, the report said.

The GAO found the TSA generally did well at coordinating efforts with other agencies to enforce the mask mandate and other coronavirus-related security directives.

“While selected external stakeholders raised several issues with the security directives, they stated that TSA’s expedited coordination was generally effective,” the report said.

As part of the Cares Act, the GAO was tasked with monitoring and oversight of the nation’s response to the global pandemic. In addition, Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-Miss.), chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, also requested the GAO review the TSA’s efforts to respond to the pandemic.

The TSA last week announced it was extending a federal mask mandate [through April 18](#) that had been set to expire a month earlier. Since it was put into place last year, the requirement that people wear masks at airports and in public transportation settings has been extended four times.

In September, the TSA announced it was increasing the fines for those who refuse to wear masks from \$500 to \$1,000 for the first instance, and from \$1,000 to \$3,000 for repeat offenders.

The mandate has drawn criticism from some Republicans, including Sen. Roger Wicker (Miss.), the top Republican on the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, who has lobbied to end the mask requirement.

Airlines began requiring customers to wear masks in mid-2020 as part of the effort to contain the spread of the virus. The Trump administration declined to put a mask mandate in place, but shortly after taking office, President Biden issued an order that required mask-wearing in all transportation settings.

While numerous studies show mask-wearing can reduce the spread of the [virus](#), the mandate has been the source of conflicts on airplanes and in airports.

In instances where passengers’ refusal to wear a mask interferes with crew members’ abilities to perform their jobs, the Federal Aviation Administration can issue fines and refer cases to the Department of Justice for prosecution. The FAA received nearly 6,000 unruly-passenger reports in 2021, more than 4,200 of which were mask-related.

So far this year, it has received 814 unruly-passenger reports, 535 of which have been mask-related.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Rising Covid infections UK, Europe</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/15/health/covid-rising-uk-us/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/15/health/covid-rising-uk-us/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>(CNN)Two weeks after the United Kingdom dropped its last remaining Covid-19 mitigation measure -- a requirement that people who test positive for the virus isolate for five days -- the country is seeing cases and hospitalizations climb once again.</p> <p>Covid-19 <a href="#">cases were up</a> 48% in the UK last week compared with the week before. Hospitalizations were up 17% over the same period.</p> <p>The country's daily case rate -- about 55,000 a day -- is still less than a third of the Omicron peak, but cases are rising as fast as they were falling just two weeks earlier, when the country removed pandemic-related restrictions.</p> <p>Daily cases are also rising in <a href="#">more than half of the countries in the European Union</a>. They've jumped 48% in the Netherlands and 20% in Germany over the past week, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. But daily cases in Germany had yet to drop below pre-Omicron levels, and the Netherlands hadn't seen cases fall as much as they did in the UK.</p>



The situation in Europe has the attention of public health officials for two reasons: First, the UK offers a preview of what may play out in the United States, and second, something unusual seems to be happening. In previous waves, increases in Covid hospitalizations lagged behind jumps in cases by about 10 days to two weeks. Now, in the UK, cases and hospitalizations seem to be rising in tandem, something that has experts stumped.

"So we're obviously keenly interested in what's going on with that," Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told CNN.

Fauci said he's spoken with his UK counterparts, and they have pegged the rise to a combination three factors. In order of contribution, Fauci said, these are:

- The BA.2 variant, which is more transmissible than the original Omicron
- The opening of society, with people mingling more indoors without masks
- Waning immunity from vaccination or prior infection

In a [technical briefing](#) Friday, the UK Health Security Agency said BA.2 had an 80% higher relative growth rate than the original Omicron strain, though it does not seem more likely to lead to hospitalization.

Given that BA.2 doesn't seem to be causing more severe disease -- at least not in the highly vaccinated British population -- it's not clear why hospitalizations are ticking up.

"The issue with hospitalization is a little bit more puzzling, because although the hospitalizations are going up, it is very clear their use of ICU beds has not increased," Fauci said. "So are the numbers of hospitalizations a real reflection of Covid cases, or is there a difficulty deciphering between people coming into the hospital with Covid or because of Covid?"

The US, like the UK, has lifted most mitigation measures as Covid-19 infections have fallen. Two weeks ago, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention changed how it measures Covid-19 impact in communities. The [new metric](#) -- which relies on hospitalizations and hospital capacity in addition to cases -- did away with masking recommendations for most parts of the country. States and schools have followed suit, lifting indoor masking requirements.

"Without a doubt, opening up society and having people mingle indoors is clearly something that is a contributor, as well as overall waning immunity, which means we've really got to stay heads-up and keep our eye on the pattern here," Fauci said. "So that's the reason why we're watching this very carefully."

Michael Osterholm, who directs the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, told CNN, "it's like a weather alert. Right now, the skies are sunny and bright, and we hope they stay that way. But we could have some bad weather by evening, and we just don't know."

### **What will BA.2 do in the US?**

BA.2 has been growing steadily in the US. Last week, the CDC estimated it was causing about 12% of new Covid-19 cases here.

Meanwhile, BA.2 now accounts for more than 50% of cases in the UK and several other European countries.

"The tipping point seems to be right around 50%," said Keri Althoff, an epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "That's when we really start to see that variant flex its power in the population" as far as showing its severity.

Althoff said although the UK may provide a glimpse of the future, there are key differences that will affect how BA.2 plays out in the United States.

In the UK, 86% of eligible people are fully vaccinated, and 67% are boosted, compared with 69% of those eligible vaccinated and 50% boosted in the US.

"What we see happening in the UK is going to be perhaps a better story than what we should be expecting here," Althoff said.

In the Netherlands, it took about a month for BA.2 to overpower BA.1, she noted. If the same timeline occurs in the US, that will mean the variant is taking off just as the immunity generated by winter's Omicron infections will be waning.

"I'm concerned about that," Althoff said. "But we were in a similar situation last spring, where we really got hopeful that things were going to settle down, and we got a little bit of a summer, and then we got walloped by Delta."

It will be important for people to understand they may be able to take their masks off for a few weeks, Althoff said, but they might also need to go back to wearing them regularly if cases spike.

"We could see another wave of illness at our hospitals," she said.

Althoff will also be closely watching [wastewater data](#) over the next few weeks.

"Wastewater surveillance is an incredible advancement in how we can monitor SARS-CoV-2 and what it's doing in the population without needing, really, any input from people," she said. "Keeping our eye on wastewater surveillance is an important tool to understand where the virus is going and if it's increasing in terms of infection."

### **Preparing for the next wave**

Protection against the next variant has to start with vaccination.

"We absolutely have to continue to find people who are unvaccinated and get them vaccinated," Althoff said.

Fauci agreed that vaccination rates could be better in all age groups but said current numbers are especially bad for kids. Data collected by the CDC show about 28% of children ages 5 to 11 are fully vaccinated, while 58% of kids ages 12 to 17 have had two doses of a Covid-19 vaccine.

Even though the youngest children, those under 5, can't yet be vaccinated, recent studies have shown young kids are less likely to catch Covid-19 when they're surrounded by vaccinated older children and adults.

"So the way you protect them is to surround the children, to the extent possible, with people who are vaccinated and boosted so that you have somewhat a veil of protection around them," Fauci said.

It will also be important to continue to be flexible.

"The important thing in this massive experiment where we're dropping all masking and restrictions is we have to stay diligent in terms of monitoring of it and testing and be prepared to possibly reverse a lot of the relaxing of these restrictions," said Deborah Fuller, a microbiologist at the University of Washington.

"We can't let our guard down, because the message that people get when they say 'we're lifting restrictions' is the pandemic is over. And it's not," she said.

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HEADLINE	03/16 Nordic countries wonder: next on Putin list?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/16/europe/nordic-defense-ukraine-crisis-intl-cmd/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/16/europe/nordic-defense-ukraine-crisis-intl-cmd/index.html</a>



(CNN)Russian President Vladimir Putin's [full-scale invasion of Ukraine](#) has done more to unify Western Europe than almost any event since the end of World War II.

Nations that were neutral have [provided arms](#) for Ukrainians; governments that had for years missed their NATO defense spending obligations have made [spectacular U-turns](#); and countries that had deep economic ties to Russia have gone further in [breaking the link](#) than anyone had seriously envisaged little over a month ago.

The West's almost unprecedented unity on sanctions, political and military action has left many in Europe, despite the horrors of Putin's war, optimistic that the continent will emerge from this better equipped to deal with security threats.

Nowhere is this truer than in the three Nordic nations that sit on the Scandinavian Peninsula: Norway, Sweden and Finland.

The fate of these three countries has been brought into sharp focus by the crisis in Ukraine due to their unique relationship with each other, the rest of Europe and Russia.

Both Norway and Finland share land borders with Russia, though Norway's is significantly smaller at under 124 miles, compared to Finland's 800-mile frontier. Norway, the Western-most of the three, is a member of NATO but is not in the European Union, while Finland and Sweden are in the EU, but not in NATO.

All three have historically supported a non-confrontational approach to Russia since the breakup of the Soviet Union due to their proximity. Also, all three are also members of the EU's Schengen area, meaning there is borderless travel between the three countries.

It's these last two facts that have played a significant role in the major rethink of European security over the past three weeks: How can you have a policy of non-confrontation when you also simultaneously share an open land mass with Russia?

One senior European defense official told CNN that "if Putin succeeds in Ukraine, then we are already asking the question of who is next?" They added that, due to the open borders between the three, any compromise of the Finnish border would "traumatic" for the peninsula.

Active conversations, once viewed by Sweden and Finland as a risky act of provocation against Russia, are now taking place in both countries about joining NATO. And, along with their neighbor Norway, both are throwing non-confrontation out the window.

"Finland and Sweden suddenly breaking long-held position(s) not to export arms to war zones and sending supplies to Ukraine has been the biggest shock for Europeans in terms of the Nordic response -- and I suspect for Putin," said Charly Saloniuss-Pasternak, a leading researcher in global security at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

He anticipates that we could see bolder moves yet from the three due to commitments made in the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF) Vision 2025 paper, which sets out plans for closer military cooperation between five Nordic nations who have different relations with NATO and the EU.

"If suddenly Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland are storing weapons and units in other countries and coordinating their action, then we are in the territory of hard security operating across EU and NATO borders, which will really make life harder for Russia," Saloniuss-Pasternak said.

The severity and robustness of the Nordic has response has raised the prospect of Finland joining NATO. Alexander Stubb, a former prime minister of Finland, believes that joining NATO is a lot more likely because Putin has wrecked the careful balance Finland had maintained for years.

"Strategically, we always wanted to keep joining NATO in our back pocket as a deterrent to stop Russia from aggressive behavior. We maintained the balance of our military being compatible with NATO, while not being members of the alliance," Stubb told CNN.

However, he believes that Putin's actions have made that balance impossible. "Finland is driven by what I call rational fear. We can see Russia's aggression and we don't want to get left alone as we were in World War II."

While joining NATO would be a major statement, there is an argument to be made that it makes little difference in a world where there is such universal revulsion at Putin's actions.

"For years, Finland and Sweden had been taking action to mitigate the fact they were not in NATO by strengthening ties with the US, UK and the rest of the transatlantic community," says Håkon Lunde Saxi, an associate professor at the Norwegian Defence University College.

He says that things like NORDEFCO and Nordic nations cooperating more closely on security make the region less vulnerable in a way that, in some respects, transcends membership of EU and NATO.

"The most powerful message of the past few weeks has been the unity," Saxi said.

"First, Denmark and Sweden sent lethal equipment to Ukraine, then Finland and Norway followed suit. The urgency of the situation is ensuring that this kind of cooperation is accelerating, which makes protecting ourselves against any opponent more possible," he added.

It must be hard for Putin and his accomplices to fathom, but their barbaric war in Ukraine has galvanized parts of Europe that had once bent over backwards to accommodate Russia into previously unthinkable action.

Whenever the horror ends, he might wake up to a very different Europe that is almost unrecognizable to the one he'd been able to bully with gas and rhetoric. And some of the most vocal opponents might be waiting right on his doorstep.

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HEADLINE	03/15 Saudi Arabia yuan not dollars for China oil?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-considers-accepting-yuan-instead-of-dollars-for-chinese-oil-sales-11647351541?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-considers-accepting-yuan-instead-of-dollars-for-chinese-oil-sales-11647351541?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>Saudi Arabia is in active talks with Beijing to price some of its oil sales to China in yuan, people familiar with the matter said, a move that would dent the U.S. dollar's dominance of the global petroleum market and mark another <a href="#">shift by the world's top crude exporter toward Asia</a>.</p> <p>The talks with China over yuan-priced oil contracts have been off and on for six years but have accelerated this year as the Saudis have <a href="#">grown increasingly unhappy</a> with decades-old U.S. security commitments to defend the kingdom, the people said.</p> <p>The Saudis are angry over the U.S.'s lack of support for their intervention in <a href="#">the Yemen civil war</a>, and over the Biden administration's <a href="#">attempt to strike a deal with Iran</a> over its nuclear program. Saudi officials have said they were shocked by the precipitous <a href="#">U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan</a> last year.</p> <p>China buys more than 25% of the oil that Saudi Arabia exports. If priced in yuan, those sales would boost the standing of China's currency. The Saudis are also considering including yuan-denominated futures contracts, known as the petroyuan, in the pricing model of <a href="#">Saudi Arabian Oil Co.</a>, known as Aramco.</p> <p>It would be a profound shift for Saudi Arabia to price even some of its roughly 6.2 million barrels of day of crude exports in anything other than dollars. The majority of <a href="#">global oil sales</a>—around 80%—are done in</p>

dollars, and the Saudis have traded oil exclusively in dollars since 1974, in a deal with the Nixon administration that included security guarantees for the kingdom.

China [introduced yuan-priced oil contracts in 2018](#) as part of its efforts to make its currency tradable across the world, but they haven't made a dent in the dollar's dominance of the oil market. For China, using dollars has become a hazard highlighted by U.S. sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program and on Russia in response to [the Ukraine invasion](#).

China has stepped up its courtship of the Saudi kingdom. In recent years, China has helped Saudi Arabia [build its own ballistic missiles](#), consulted on a nuclear program and [begun investing](#) in Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's pet projects, [such as Neom](#), a futuristic new city. Saudi Arabia has invited Chinese President Xi Jinping [to visit later this year](#).

Meanwhile the Saudi relationship with the U.S. has deteriorated under President Biden, who said in the 2020 campaign that [the kingdom should be a "pariah"](#) for the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. Prince Mohammed, who U.S. intelligence authorities say ordered Mr. Khashoggi's killing, refused to sit in on a call between Mr. Biden and the Saudi ruler, King Salman, last month.

It also comes as the U.S. economic relationship with the Saudis is diminishing. The U.S. is now among the top oil producers in the world. It once imported 2 million barrels of Saudi crude a day in the early 1990s but those numbers have fallen to less than 500,000 barrels a day in December 2021, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

By contrast, China's oil imports have swelled over the last three decades, in line with its expanding economy. Saudi Arabia was China's top crude supplier in 2021, selling at 1.76 million barrels a day, followed by Russia at 1.6 million barrels a day, according to data from China's General Administration of Customs.

"The dynamics have dramatically changed. The U.S. relationship with the Saudis has changed, China is the world's biggest crude importer and they are offering many lucrative incentives to the kingdom," said a Saudi official familiar with the talks.

"China has been offering everything you could possibly imagine to the kingdom," the official said.

A senior U.S. official called the idea of the Saudis selling oil to China in yuan "highly volatile and aggressive" and "not very likely." The official said the Saudis had floated the idea in the past when there was tension between Washington and Riyadh.

It is possible the Saudis could back off. Switching millions of barrels of oil trades from dollars to yuan every day could rattle the Saudi economy, which has a currency, the riyal, pegged to the dollar. Prince Mohammed's aides have been warning him of unpredictable economic damage if he moves ahead with the plan hastily.

Doing more sales in yuan would more closely connect Saudi Arabia to China's currency, which hasn't caught on with international investors because of the tight controls Beijing keeps on it. Contracting oil sales in a less stable currency could also undermine the Saudi government's fiscal outlook.

Some officials have cautioned Prince Mohammed that accepting payments for oil in yuan would pose risks to Saudi revenues tied in U.S. Treasury bonds abroad and the limited availability of the yuan outside China.

The impact on the Saudi economy would likely depend on the quantity of oil sales involved and the price of oil. Some economists said moving away from dollar-denominated oil sales would diversify the kingdom's revenue base and could eventually lead it to repeg the riyal to a basket of currencies, similar to Kuwait's dinar.

	<p>“If it is (done) now at a time of strong oil prices, it would not be seen negatively. It would be more seen as deepening ties with China,” said Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank.</p> <p>The Saudis still plan to do most oil transactions in dollars, the people familiar with their talks say. But the move could tempt other producers to price their Chinese exports in yuan as well. China’s other big sources of oil are Russia, Angola and Iraq.</p> <p>The Saudi move could chip away at the supremacy of the U.S. dollar in the international financial system, which Washington has relied on for decades to print Treasury bills it uses to finance its budget deficit.</p> <p>“The oil market, and by extension the entire global commodities market, is the insurance policy of the status of the dollar as reserve currency,” said economist Gal Luft, co-director of the Washington-based Institute for the Analysis of Global Security who co-wrote a book about de-dollarization. “If that block is taken out of the wall, the wall will begin to collapse.”</p> <p>Talks with China over pricing oil in yuan started before Prince Mohammed, the de facto leader of the kingdom, made his first official visit to China in 2016, people familiar with the matter said. The crown prince asked the kingdom’s then-energy minister Khalid al-Falih to study the proposal, the people said.</p> <p>Mr. Falih instructed Aramco to prepare a memo that heavily focuses on the economic challenges of switching to the yuan pricing.</p> <p>“He really did not think that was a good idea but he could not stop the talks as the ship had already sailed,” said another person familiar with the meetings.</p> <p>Saudi officials in favor of the shift have argued the kingdom could use part of yuan revenues to pay Chinese contractors involved in mega projects domestically, which would help mitigate some of the risks associated with the capital controls over the currency. China could also offer incentives such as multibillion-dollar investments in the kingdom.</p> <p>Another official familiar with the talks said yuan pricing could give the Saudis more influence with the Chinese and help convince Beijing to reduce support for Iran.</p> <p>Ali Shihabi, who sits on the board of Neom and formerly ran a pro-Saudi think tank in Washington, said the kingdom can’t ignore China’s desire to pay for oil imports in its own currency, particularly after the U.S. and EU blocked the Russian central bank from selling foreign currencies in its reserves stockpile.</p> <p>“Any doubts countries had about the need to diversify into Yuan and other currencies/geographies would have ended with that huge step,” Mr. Shihabi tweeted in response to this article.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Part-time retirement programs on rise</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/part-time-retirement-programs-are-on-the-rise-11647336602?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos5">https://www.wsj.com/articles/part-time-retirement-programs-are-on-the-rise-11647336602?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos5</a>
GIST	<p>Plenty of older workers have wished for something between full-bore work and retirement. Now, more companies seem to be giving them what they want.</p> <p>Phased retirement programs—which allow workers nearing retirement age to cut back on their hours while keeping some pay and benefits—are growing in popularity. Human-resource executives say the pandemic has opened bosses to flexible work arrangements, while the fierce hiring market and higher-than-expected rate of retirements have motivated managers to find ways to retain older workers with key skills.</p> <p>In a forthcoming survey of 1,736 HR executives world-wide from consultant Mercer LLC, about 38% say they offer phased retirement, more than double the 17.2% that did so before the pandemic.</p>

In the U.S. 23% of employers had these arrangements in 2021, up from 16% in 2016, according to the Society for Human Resources Management. A growing subset—8%, up from 6% in 2019—have introduced formal programs, which generally target older workers who meet certain criteria. Another 15% offer the option on an informal or ad hoc basis, frequently to employees in hard-to-fill roles.

Phased retirement is “a way to slow the brain drain and manage talent shortages” at a time when the U.S. workforce is aging, said Andrés Tapia, a senior partner at consulting firm Korn Ferry. He encourages clients to add the programs to “find ways to leverage rather than lose that voice of experience.”

Some workers have longed for such arrangements, which financial advisers say can provide financial and psychological benefits compared with going from full-time work to retirement. Among companies adopting phased retirement programs, figuring out how to provide benefits and set criteria for participation can be a sticking point in some HR suites, said Yvonne Sonsino, a partner at Mercer.

Potential legal and financial complications loom, consultants say, not to mention the fact that some companies would like their longest-tenured people to move on.

Companies adding or considering formal phased retirement programs include SAP North America, Owens Corning and Haynes International Inc., a Kokomo, Ind.-based maker of high-temperature alloys.

The pandemic accelerated the pace of baby boomer retirements and created challenges for employers. From February 2020 through November 2021, up to 2.6 million more people retired than were expected to, given pre-pandemic trends, according to Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis senior economist Miguel Faria-e-Castro.

Universities have long offered phased retirement programs to tenured professors, in part to make room for younger faculty. Others with the benefit include the federal government, some law and accounting firms, and companies including Abbott Laboratories.

Many of the new programs involve employees helping train workers who will eventually take their place.

Kathy Bird, who leads employee communications for SAP North America, started considering retirement last summer when she and her husband moved from Pennsylvania to coastal North Carolina. She imagined devoting more time to volunteering and golf but said she felt unready to leave the job she loves.

Ms. Bird, now 66 years old, approached her manager. They discussed her cutting back to a part-time schedule and training a colleague to take on more of her duties. Ms. Bird will begin working 20 hours a week starting in July and will keep all of her benefits during the transition. She and her manager haven’t yet determined how her pay will be adjusted to reflect her reduced schedule.

“For me, it’s kind of the best of both worlds,” said Ms. Bird.

Her manager, Jackie Montesinos-Suarez, agrees. “Her giving me 20 hours a week, from a business continuity standpoint as a manager, that’s a no-brainer.”

SAP is working on formalizing a phased retirement program. Dan Healy, an HR executive there, noted that plans are in the works, and that the company has seen increased interest from workers close to retirement.

Owens Corning, a Toledo, Ohio-based maker of building and construction materials, launched a phased retirement program in 2020. Salaried employees age 55 or older with at least five years at the company can ask to be considered for the program, which allows part-time work and pay with full-time benefits, including health insurance, often for three to 12 months.

With a projected wave of retirements, “we were concerned we were going to lose a lot of institutional knowledge and intellectual capital,” said Paula Russell, chief human resource officer.

The program gives the company time to recruit and train a successor before the employee in the job retires, she said.

Managers typically approve phased retirement for workers with hard-to-replace skills; participants have included engineers, legal specialists and research and development staff, Ms. Russell said. Employees often retain some responsibilities in addition to helping train a successor, she said.

Thirty employees have participated so far. Eight are in the program now, with more in discussions.

Consumer goods maker Unilever PLC started U-Work, a program combining elements of contract work with some stable pay and benefits, in 2020 in the U.K. Unilever has expanded the program to eight other countries and is considering bringing it to the U.S.

The initial goal was to retain older workers who want to phase into retirement, said Morag Lynagh, the company's global future of work director. Rising demand for flexible work prompted Unilever to make the program available to employees of all ages, she said.

Employees in U-Work can take breaks between assignments, some of which entail part-time commitments. In return for committing to working a certain number of weeks a year, employees receive a monthly retainer fee and some benefits, including a 401(k)-style retirement plan.

During an assignment, they earn additional income at the rate set for the job. The goal is to provide "flexibility with security," Ms. Lynagh said.

In the U.K., 75 employees are in the program, about half of whom are 50 or older. The program accepts applicants whose skills are suited to the projects the company anticipates, Ms. Lynagh said.

Obstacles to adopting phased retirement programs can include the risk of lawsuits for allowing some—but not all—workers to participate, said Chantel Sheaks, vice president of retirement policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The rules of some pension and 401(k) plans can also create complexities. People phasing into retirement may want to tap their retirement benefits to supplement a lower paycheck. Many employers allow employees ages 59 ½ or older to tap their 401(k) accounts without penalty, but some don't.

Although companies can amend their pension plans to allow workers to take partial withdrawals starting as early as age 59 ½, that can backfire if it encourages more people to retire early, Ms. Sheaks said.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Mykolaiv holds line against Russia attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/15/urkaine-mikolaiv-russia-war/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/15/urkaine-mikolaiv-russia-war/</a>
GIST	<p>MYKOLAIV, Ukraine — At the front line of the battle for southern Ukraine, Diana was having her birthday party in the unfinished basement of an apartment building. She turned 5 on Monday. In the absence of a cake, her parents stuck a candle in a mandarin orange and told her to make a wish.</p> <p>After she blew out the flame, Diana told them she asked for the war to end soon.</p> <p>“Come see the basement, that’s where we live,” she said, bounding down the stairs that lead to the space that’s now a bomb shelter for the neighborhood.</p> <p>Some people have brought down cots and air mattresses to place on the cold earthen ground. It’s dark. The fighting in the distance during the day sounds like far-off thunder. At night, the bombardment is louder and closer.</p>



One elderly woman has her dog with her. Diana has her stuffed bear.

This apartment building complex in southeastern Mykolaiv is in range of Russia's multiple-launch rocket systems located in nearby Kherson, the first significant city Moscow's military captured since its invasion of Ukraine started nearly three weeks ago. Now Mykolaiv, a city of about 500,000 people on Ukraine's Black Sea shoreline, is all that's standing in Russia's way of an assault on the major port city of Odessa.

But despite more than a week of heavy bombardment, Ukraine's forces in Mykolaiv have remarkably thwarted Russian advances — a major blow to the Kremlin's apparent plans for an attack on Odessa, an economic lifeline for Ukraine as one of the largest Black Sea ports. Though Russian warships have lingered off the coast of Odessa, local officials have said the Russians are probably delaying any amphibious assault until they can get more ground support from their forces in the east.

That is how Mykolaiv has become a crucial roadblock. The region's governor, Vitaliy Kim, told The Washington Post on Monday that some Russian forces were beaten back from here and are currently located in Kherson, about 40 miles to the southeast. They've repeatedly shelled the city, including civilian residences, with suspected cluster munitions, but have been unable to move into Mykolaiv itself.

Ukraine's stand at Mykolaiv underscores how Russia's advance in parts of the country has stalled, making this war more of a fight than many expected. Russia has more manpower and firepower, but it has been bogged down by what U.S. officials have said was a poor military strategy and basic logistical and supply issues.

"The forces that they sent, they thought they'd easily march through here because this was a region that didn't have enough military presence," Kim said. "But we've showed them the opposite, with our soldiers and our civilian defense, that they have no business roaming around on our land."

Kim has become the face of Mykolaiv's resistance and a major national figure. Perhaps inspired by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's powerful video messages from downtown Kyiv, Kim cheerfully addresses Mykolaiv citizens with similar short updates posted to his Telegram channel every few hours. His feed has 700,000 subscribers, more than the city's population.

"Good day, we are from Ukraine," Kim starts every video, holding up a peace sign. On Monday, he told viewers that an air-raid alert in the city would be extended because the Russians had heavily shelled the region overnight and "we don't know what's in the head of those dummies." The day before, Kim thanked everyone for the birthday wishes — he turned 41 — and said, "how dumb these occupiers are, it's just a catastrophe."

"They go from one direction and get bashed, they go from another direction and get bashed and then go from a third direction and get bashed as well," he said with a grin.

His optimistic nature in the face of an assault on his city has resonated with Ukrainians and turned Kim into something of a celebrity. At a military checkpoint at the edge of the city, a soldier commented that meeting Kim now is "like meeting Biden."

"It just seems like everything is relaxed and easy here, but this is hard work every day," Kim told The Post. "But there's no need to look sad or feel tired over it."

Like other cities across Ukraine, Mykolaiv has adapted to wartime. Movements across the city's bridges are regulated through checkpoints. If Russians manage to gain ground here, the bridges might be blown up to prevent any further advance. Stacks of tires are positioned around streets with molotov cocktails, or petrol bombs, beside them, ready to be set ablaze if Russian troops approach.

There are also signs of the fight that has already taken place. On one downtown street, the glass facade of a furniture store was shattered. Two homes across the street have had the roofs burned off. This is where Ukrainian and Russian armored vehicles had a shootout in the first days of the war and where the

Ukrainians said they destroyed the Russian column. The damage left behind is at once a reminder of the war's toll and a proud symbol of a small victory.

At a pharmacy down the road, a shell landed in front, shattered the sign and knocked out power. Two days later, the pharmacy continued its work, powered by a generator. The local zoo, which boasts the most animals of any zoo in Ukraine, has had four projectiles land on its property. The animals have not been evacuated and are being fed daily, said Volodymyr Topchiy, the zoo's director.

A rocket that landed on the grounds on Feb. 27 is now on display in the zoo's museum. Another still-unexploded ordnance is nestled into the ground in a bustard's dwelling.

"This is such a rare bird; there are only two in Ukraine," Topchiy said. The bird was unharmed and remains in its home — along with the shell.

The rocket appeared to carry cluster munitions, according to two former military bomb technicians who reviewed photos of it. The cluster bomblets are indiscriminately released over a wide area and have a high dud rate, posing a threat to civilians who may encounter them later on.

"I'm getting the sense that Mykolaiv is getting used to the shelling and is ignoring it," Kim said in his Tuesday morning video message. "At the moment, everyone's calm."

In the city's Korabelnyi district, a shell from a Russian multiple-launch rocket system, which has a range of about 50 miles, landed on an apartment building, causing one whole side to catch fire. Alexander Zadere lived in the building next door, so he and his son managed to get his 83-year-old mother out of the apartment where she had lived for more than 50 years. She was shocked and scared but not injured.

The wall that faces outside was gone. The flames peeled the paint off the walls. The television was destroyed, but the remote resting on the charred couch was undamaged.

Zadere has already turned his attention to renovating the place for her, sure that there is a future here. The money he had been saving for a country house will now be used to rebuild here.

"As a Mykolaiv native, I can tell you they won't pass through us," he said. "Victory will follow us."

Diana's bunker birthday party was taking place in the apartment building next door. The one open store in the area sold chocolate eggs with a toy inside, so that was the present Diana's grandmother bought her.

Diana was cheerful, despite the war all around her. She sang a song about cats and danced outside while it was temporarily safe to leave the underground dwelling. She's been sleeping through the night. Her parents smiled and said they hoped Diana wouldn't remember this when she grew up.

They worried about how much more their city could withstand.

"If Mykolaiv goes, it's not clear that other cities will hold for as long as this one has," said Sveta, Diana's mom. "We're getting used to it, but we don't want to. We don't want to live with this pain and fear."

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HEADLINE	03/15 Mariupol descends into devastation, misery
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/15/ukraine-mariupol-devastation/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/15/ukraine-mariupol-devastation/</a>
GIST	<p>In the more than two weeks that it has been cut off from the outside world, Mariupol, the southern Ukrainian port city, has become synonymous with the horror of the Russian invasion.</p> <p>It is a place of overflowing morgues, newly dug mass graves and bodies in some cases buried under rubble or left in the streets where they fell.</p>

Hundreds of people fled Mariupol for the second straight day via a humanitarian corridor on Tuesday, but Ukrainian officials told Reuters that those who escaped were a small fraction of the 200,000 trapped in the city and in need of urgent assistance. Russian forces have continued to block a much-needed aid convoy from getting in, Ukrainian officials said.

As conditions in the city have grown more dire and the death count has surged, word of the humanitarian catastrophe has leaked out through intermittent phone calls, shakily shot videos, Associated Press journalists and testimony from the handful of aid groups still working in the city.

“People in Mariupol have endured a weeks-long life-and-death nightmare,” said Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, whose staff was trapped in the city. ICRC officials warned that time was running out for the civilians who remain there.

Some of the most harrowing images from the city have been captured by average citizens with cellphones.

“In the city center, it’s a real meat grinder: This land is soaked in blood, bitterness and despair,” one Mariupol citizen said in a video posted online Sunday. The video showed empty streets, blocks of broken windows and stores stripped of food by starving citizens. It lingered over men cooking their dinner over a campfire in a city that has endured subzero temperatures and nearly two weeks without heat or water.

“The world doesn’t know what’s happening here,” the narrator said as he navigated past blown out buildings. “It’s terrible.”

A major concern among military analysts is that [Mariupol could provide a glimpse of what is to come](#) in other Ukrainian cities, such as Kyiv, as the war grinds on. “We’re trying to understand the destruction, but the truth is that it is part and parcel of how the Russians fight,” said Rita Konaev, an urban warfare expert and associate director of analysis at Georgetown University’s Center for Security and Emerging Technology. “We keep hearing that Ukraine is not like Syria or it is not like Chechnya. In Mariupol, we’re learning that is not true.”

Even under the best of circumstances, urban warfare is a bloody business that exacts its heaviest toll on civilians trapped in the crossfire. The Russian version of urban warfare has proved itself to be especially cruel in recent decades, Konaev said. Because of their huge logistics challenges and seemingly poor morale, Russian forces have struggled to take large Ukrainian cities. The Russian forces, however, still possess the air power and artillery cannons to flatten them. Increasingly, the Russians appear to be using their massive firepower advantage — especially in Mariupol — to depopulate Ukraine’s urban centers and then take them over.

“It is easier to declare victory over rubble than resistance,” Konaev said, summing up the Russian approach.

In Mariupol, where Russian forces bombed a maternity hospital last week, the results have proved especially devastating, yielding some of the most searing images of the war. Among them was a shot of emergency employees and volunteers carrying a badly wounded woman on a stretcher from a shelled hospital. “Kill me now!” the woman was said to have cried out when she realized she was losing her baby, according to the Associated Press, which continues to have journalists in the city.

Days later, the surgeon who had fought to save her told Ukrainian television from Mariupol that both she and her unborn child had died after desperate attempts to resuscitate them. The two lives were added to a death toll that has been growing at an alarming rate, according to Ukrainian officials. The city council reported that 1,582 civilians had died in the first 12 days of the fighting in Mariupol. In the last four days, 1,000 more civilians have been killed, driving the death toll to more than 2,500, Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to the Ukrainian president, told Reuters. News agencies, which have limited access to Mariupol, have been unable confirm the totals.

Multiple strikes hit in the area around the maternity hospital destroying apartment blocks, government buildings and parts of a technical university. In many neighborhoods errant bombs left behind craters that appeared to be at least 20 feet deep.

To survive, Mariupol residents have resorted to cutting down trees for firewood, melting snow and breaking open heating systems in search of potable water, according to aid groups with personnel in the city. Most supermarkets have been stripped bare of any remaining food.

“The sound of warfare is constant. Buildings are struck and shrapnel flies everywhere,” Sasha Volkov, the ICRC’s leader in Mariupol, said in a statement. “This is the situation every person in the city faces.”

In a rare call from the city, where cellphones work intermittently at best, a Mariupol official struck a similar note in a brief interview with NPR: “It’s absolutely terrifying. It’s absolutely destroyed now,” he said. “It’s more like a ruin from a historical movie about World War II.”

A big remaining question is why the Russians have chosen to concentrate so much artillery and misery on Mariupol, which sits 35 miles from the Russian border and for years has depended on close relations and heavy traffic from its neighbor.

“Nobody in their right mind thinks this war can be solved with a full-fledged victory by one side or the other,” said Olga Oliker, a program director with the International Crisis Group, in a recent discussion posted online. “They are fighting for the negotiating table.”

“Mariupol is the outlier so far,” said Rob Lee, former Marine infantry officer and Russia defense scholar at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. Lee speculated that the presence of the Azov battalion, a Ukrainian armed group that has developed a reputation for fearlessness in battle and disturbing far-right ties, could be driving the Russian campaign to retake the city.

Russian President Vladimir Putin baselessly claimed that he invaded Ukraine to “denazify” the country, which is led by a Jewish president. Killing or capturing the members of the Azov battalion could be an important public relations victory for Putin who must justify the loss of Russian soldiers in a war that increasingly appears unwinnable, Lee said.

To that end, Mariupol is one of the few places so far where Russian forces have pushed into a city and engaged in direct urban combat with the Ukrainian military.

Despite the carnage and suffering in Mariupol, military analysts warned that the situation could still get far worse. In Chechnya, Russian forces fired as many as 30,000 artillery rounds into Grozny in a single day, said John Spencer, a retired Army major and chair of Urban Warfare Studies with the Madison Policy Forum. In Syria, large swaths of Aleppo were rendered uninhabitable.

So far, Russian forces haven’t rained anywhere near that much firepower on a Ukrainian city.

“Having watched how the Russians fight wars over the years, this is nowhere close to all they can do,” said Oliker of the International Crisis Group. “They can do a whole lot more if they really let go and attack civilian areas.”

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HEADLINE	03/15 Exceptional warmth to North Pole
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/15/north-pole-melting-arctic-climate/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/15/north-pole-melting-arctic-climate/</a>
GIST	A record-breaking “bomb cyclone” that began its development over the U.S. East Coast on Friday is bringing an exceptional insurgence of mild air to the Arctic. Temperatures around 50 degrees (28 Celsius) above normal could visit the North Pole on Wednesday, climbing to near the freezing mark.

It's a highly unusual and extreme bout of circumstances, particularly considering the North Pole is still in a nearly [six-month period of darkness known as "polar night."](#) The sun doesn't fully rise above the horizon between fall and spring equinoxes, contributing to the bone-chilling temperatures customary to the inhospitable region.

Highs in the lower 30s (0 Celsius) are not terribly unusual in the summertime, but they're far from the norm in winter. The mild temperatures are also accompanied by liquid rain at far northern latitudes, hastening the seasonal melting of sea ice.

"Looking back over the last few decades, we can clearly see a trend in warming, particularly in the 'cold season' in the Arctic," Ruth Mottram, a climate scientist with the Danish Meteorological Institute, wrote in an email. "It's not surprising that warm air is busting through into the Arctic this year. In general we expect to see more and more of these events in the future."

Temperatures [averaged over the high Arctic](#) north of 80 degrees latitude are more than 22 degrees (12 Celsius) above normal. Some forecast models indicate small areas in the Arctic, including near the North Pole, could experience temperatures as much as 45 to 54 degrees (25 to 30 Celsius) above normal Wednesday and Thursday.

### **A record 'bomb cyclone' drags warmth northward**

Mottram connected the intrusion of warm air to an atmospheric river — or concentrated jet of moisture — steered north by the bomb cyclone. A bomb cyclone is a storm or zone of low pressure that intensifies at breakneck speed.

The cyclone formed along the U.S. East Coast on Friday and Saturday, unleashing heavy snow and strong winds. Next, on Sunday and Monday, it tore through Atlantic Canada, where its pressure plummeted to that found at the core of Hurricane Sandy in 2012. Then it swept toward Greenland.

"It appears that a new record has been set for lowest pressure on record anywhere in Greenland at 934.1 hPa measured at the [Danish Meteorological Institute] station at Ikermiuarssuk," Mottram said. The pressure reading hasn't been officially certified as a record, but Mottram notes that it is consistent with other observations and model forecasts.

Average sea-level air pressure is closer to 1,000 hPa (hectoPascals); the resulting deficit was akin to removing 6.6 percent of the atmosphere's mass from the middle of the storm — hence the strong inward winds aimed at "filling the void." That entrained a strip of warm, moisture-rich air or atmospheric river that snaked poleward.

The NOAA HySplit model, which calculates the trajectories that air took to reach its destination, reveals that the air mass trucked north by the bomb cyclone curled east of Greenland and over Iceland during the weekend. Weather models indicate the same plume of warmth will reach the North Pole on Wednesday with temperatures between 29 and 33 degrees (near 0 Celsius).

### **Researchers probe Arctic warmth as sea ice levels hover at record lows**

It just so happens that a team of research scientists studying warm air intrusions has been stationed at Kiruna in northern Sweden waiting for an event like this. Since Saturday, they've been flying a [specially outfitted German aircraft called HALO](#), or High Altitude and Long Range Research Aircraft, between the North Pole and the approaching warm plume. The parent study is known as [HALO-\(AC\)<sup>3</sup>](#). It is being steered by researchers from the University of Leipzig in Germany and [involves multiple European meteorological institutions](#).

"This is exactly the situation we aim to cover with the ongoing 6-weeks campaign," the team said in a statement via email. "We are trying to put together some of the puzzle pieces of the so-called 'Arctic Amplification' (stronger warming of the Arctic compared to [mean] global warming). And warm air intrusions are actually one of the candidates to explain this phenomenon."

The Arctic is warming three times faster than the rest of the planet, and atmospheric scientists are trying to better understand the processes contributing to such swiftly rising temperatures.

Thus far, the team has observed a number of phenomena that display telltale climate implications, many of which have been spurred by the sudden warm-up.

“For example, heavy rain over sea ice,” wrote the team. “This might have serious implications on a possible early melting of the sea ice, and this in the mid of March!”

The team also encountered tall convective clouds, or clouds energized by vertical heat transfer in the atmosphere. Some had blossomed almost as tall as clouds usually found in the tropics.

“Surface temperatures in the Fram Strait are currently more than 20 degrees Celsius higher than expected from the long-term records,” the team continued. “It is not just the intensity of the current warm air intrusion, but also the duration, which seems unusual. There are indications from forecast products that the sea ice will be seriously disturbed by this massive warming event.”

According to the National Snow and Ice Data Center, current sea ice extent, defined as the area with at least 15 percent sea ice coverage, is scraping the bottom of the barrel. At present, it’s on pace to fall below the record minimum set in summer of 2012, which may occur if current trends continue. About 14.6 square kilometers are iced over, compared with a mid-March average of 15.5 square kilometers.

Temperatures in the Arctic will fall to some extent by Thursday, but they look to remain unusually mild still over the next week.

The pulse of warmth over the Arctic is one of many that have swelled over the region in recent decades. A 2017 study found warm winter events in the Arctic are becoming more frequent and longer lasting. From 1980 to 2016, an additional six warming events occurred per winter at the North Pole, lasting on average 12 hours longer, compared with the period from 1893 to 1979.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Pentagon: Russia attack stalls into 3<sup>rd</sup> week</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-03-15/russia-enters-week-3-of-war-in-ukraine-with-zero-objectives-achieved-pentagon-says">https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-03-15/russia-enters-week-3-of-war-in-ukraine-with-zero-objectives-achieved-pentagon-says</a>
GIST	<p>Wednesday will mark the beginning of the third week of Russia’s invasion into Ukraine, and its military has still not achieved any of its objectives on the ground, the U.S. military assesses.</p> <p>A senior defense official speaking on the condition of anonymity laid out the situation facing Russian forces as of Tuesday afternoon amid outside reports that Russian President Vladimir Putin fears the conflict will stall into a stalemate.</p> <p>Though starkly different conflicts in size and complexity, the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq was considered complete by its third week, when allied forces entered Baghdad’s Firdos Square and <a href="#">tore down a bronze statue of Saddam Hussein</a>.</p> <p>The leading Russian troops remain 10 to 12 miles outside Kyiv, still unable to advance further into the city following <a href="#">entrenched defense by Ukrainian forces</a> that appears to have surprised the Kremlin and the West alike. Russia has increased long-range artillery and other forms of bombing and shelling against the capital city, increasingly targeting civilian centers, the official said.</p> <p>Other city centers also remain isolated and under heavy bombardment by Russia, including Chernihiv, Mariupol and Kharkiv – where they face “stiff Ukrainian resistance.”</p> <p>Other analysts confirm that Russian forces appear stuck in their advance. Though they made some small territorial gains in previously contested areas in Ukraine’s east, they “did not conduct any major attacks</p>



toward Kyiv or in northeastern Ukraine,” according to an analysis note from the Institute for the Study of War.

“Ongoing Russian efforts to replace combat losses with both Russian replacements and non-Russian sources, including Syrian fighters and the Wagner Group, are unlikely to enable Russia to resume major offensive operations within the coming week,” it added.

The Pentagon believes Russia maintains roughly 90% of its combat power, as do Ukrainian forces.

Russian amphibious ships remain operating in the northern Black Sea, though the Pentagon does not see any indications of an imminent amphibious move toward the key port city of Odessa.

Russia has fired 950 missiles into Ukraine as of Tuesday but has not launched new attacks on western Ukraine following strikes near the city of Lviv close to the border with Poland that raised alarm among it and other NATO countries.

Moscow does not appear to have deployed forces or supplies to reinforce other embattled troops, the official said, nor has Belarus – Russia’s sole regional ally – positioned any of its forces to enter Ukraine as Western officials feared it might earlier this week.

The Pentagon also has not seen any indication Russia is preparing chemical or biological weapons attacks following widespread concern that the Kremlin’s ongoing propaganda campaign to attempt to portray similar threats from Ukraine portended its own use of such weapons.

The U.S. continues to supply weapons and other forms of security assistance to Ukraine, including within the last 24 hours, the official said, declining to offer further specifics.

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HEADLINE	03/16 Day 21 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/16/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-21-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/16/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-21-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In <b>Kyiv</b>, a 12-storey <b>residential building has been damaged after it was hit by Russian shelling</b> this morning.</li><li>• Ukraine’s second-largest city of <b>Kharkiv</b> also came under attack overnight with <b>two people confirmed dead and two residential buildings destroyed</b>, Ukraine’s state emergency services said in an <a href="#">update</a> this morning.</li><li>• Ukrainian president Volodymyr <b>Zelenskiy</b> gave a late-night national <a href="#">address</a> where he <b>confirmed meetings between Ukrainian and Russian officials continue</b>, adding that “the positions at negotiations are more realistic now”.</li><li>• However, Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak said there are “<b>fundamental contradictions</b>” in talks aimed at ending Russia’s military attack but there is “<b>certainly room for compromise</b>”.</li><li>• Addressing Russian citizens, Zelenskiy said the war would end in “<b>disgrace, poverty, year-long isolation [and] a brutal repressive system</b>”. “If you stay in your posts, if you don’t speak out against the war, <b>the international community will strip you off of everything you have earned over the years</b>. They are working on it,” he said.</li><li>• <b>Zelenskiy is due to address US Congress</b> on Wednesday and is likely to make fresh calls for a no-fly zone and requests for more military aid, including fighter jets.</li><li>• <b>EU leaders vowed support for Ukraine</b> during a visit to Kyiv. The prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia <a href="#">arrived in the capital earlier on Tuesday in a show of support</a> for Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who briefed them on the war with <a href="#">Russia</a>. Poland’s Jarosław Kaczyński called for a peacekeeping mission in <a href="#">Ukraine</a>, with Czech prime minister Petr Fiala saying: “You are not alone. Our countries stand with you. Europe stands with your country”.</li><li>• <b>Nato</b> is set to tell its military commanders on Wednesday <b>to draw up plans for new ways to deter Russia</b> following Moscow’s invasion of <a href="#">Ukraine</a>, including more troops and missile defences in eastern Europe, officials and diplomats said. The Ukrainian minster for defence,</li></ul>

	<p>Oleksii Reznikov, is expected to <b>plead for more weapons from individual Nato countries</b>, according to a Reuters report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>US president Joe <b>Biden</b> is <b>expected to announce an additional \$800m in security assistance</b> to <a href="#">Ukraine</a> on Wednesday, a White House official said as reported by Reuters news agency.</li> <li>The <b>US Senate</b> unanimously passed a resolution late on Tuesday night <b>condemning Russian president Vladimir Putin as a war criminal</b>, a rare show of unity in the deeply divided Congress.</li> <li><b>Russian forces have reportedly taken patients and medical staff of a hospital in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol hostage</b>. According to the BBC, the city's deputy mayor Sergei Orlov said there were 400 people in the hospital and the Russian army were "using our patients and doctors like hostages".</li> <li>About <b>2,000 cars</b> were able to leave <b>Mariupol</b>, according to local authorities.</li> <li>A <b>woman who interrupted a live news programme on Russian state TV</b> last night to protest against the war in <a href="#">Ukraine</a> has been <b>fined 30,000 roubles (£215)</b> by a Russian court. Marina Ovsyannikova, a Russian television producer, <a href="#">was found guilty of flouting protest legislation</a>, the Russian state news agency RIA reported.</li> <li><b>The UK is to impose sanctions on 370 more Russian individuals</b>, including more than 50 oligarchs and their families with a combined net worth of £100bn. More than 1,000 individuals and entities have now been targeted with sanctions since the invasion of Ukraine, with <a href="#">fresh measures announced</a> against key Kremlin spokespeople and political allies of Putin, including the defence minister, Sergei Shoigu.</li> <li><b>Boris Johnson</b> will visit <b>Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates</b> on Wednesday to <b>ask the Gulf states to produce more oil and help the UK reduce dependence on Russian oil</b>.</li> <li>More than <b>100,000 people in the UK</b> have offered homes to <b>Ukrainian refugees</b> in the first 24 hours of a government scheme that allows families and individuals to bring them to the UK.</li> <li><b>China's ambassador to the US</b> penned an interesting op-ed for the Washington Post, saying his <b>government knew nothing of Russia's plans and would have tried to stop it if they had</b>.</li> <li><b>China</b> also <b>lambasted Taiwan's humanitarian aid for Ukraine</b> and sanctions on <a href="#">Russia</a> as "taking advantage of other's difficulties" after the island announced it was sending more funds donated by the public for refugees.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Day 20 of the Russia invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-20-of-the-russian-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-20-of-the-russian-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A series of Russian strikes hit a residential neighbourhood in the capital on Tuesday morning, igniting a huge fire and prompting a frantic rescue effort in a 15-storey apartment building. Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said <a href="#">five people were killed in the airstrikes</a> on residential buildings this morning.</li> <li>About <b>2,000 cars</b> were able to leave the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol, according to local authorities. Officials said <a href="#">a further 2,000 cars</a> were waiting to leave the city. Deputy prime minister Iryna Vereshchuk said a convoy with supplies for Mariupol was stuck at nearby Berdyansk. There are reports that Russian forces have taken patients and medical staff of a hospital in Mariupol as hostages.</li> <li><b>More than 100 buses carrying civilians</b> have left the besieged city of Sumy in north-eastern Ukraine for a safe area, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said. The evacuation <a href="#">consists of two separate convoys headed towards Poltava</a>, in central Ukraine, ICRC spokesperson Jason Straziuso told Reuters.</li> <li><b>Talks between Russia and <a href="#">Ukraine</a> resumed this afternoon</b>, Ukrainian negotiator Mykhailo Podolyak said. On Monday, Podolyak said <a href="#">negotiations had taken a "technical pause"</a> until Tuesday for "additional work in the working subgroups and clarification of individual definitions".</li> <li><b>US president Joe Biden</b> will attend an EU summit in Brussels next week, an EU official said, <a href="#">according to AFP</a>.</li> </ul>

- **Nearly 100 children have died in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Zelenskiy said** in a virtual address to Canadian lawmakers. [Zelenskiy pleaded for Canada and its allies to do more](#) to stop the Russian invasion of his country, including establishing a no-fly zone as civilian casualties mount.
- **A woman who interrupted a live news programme on Russian state TV last night to protest against the war in Ukraine has been fined 30,000 roubles (£215) by a Russian court.** Marina Ovsyannikova, a Russian television producer, [was found guilty of flouting protest legislation](#), the Russian state news agency RIA reported.
- **Russian prosecutors have asked a court to move jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny to a maximum security prison after requesting that he serve 13 years in prison on new fraud charges,** AFP reported. Navalny, [Vladimir Putin's most vocal critic in Russia](#), was jailed last year for parole violations related to charges he says were trumped up.
- **The UK is to impose sanctions on 370 more Russian individuals, including more than 50 oligarchs and their families with a combined net worth of £100bn.** More than 1,000 individuals and entities have now been targeted with sanctions since the invasion of Ukraine, [with fresh measures announced](#) against key Kremlin spokespeople and political allies of Putin, including the defence minister, Sergei Shoigu.
- **More than 100,000 people have offered homes to Ukrainian refugees in the first 24 hours of a government scheme that allows families and individuals to bring them to the UK.** The website for registering interest in the scheme [crashed for a short while](#) because of the numbers offering help.
- An adviser to the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said on Tuesday that **the war in Ukraine was at a crossroads that could lead either to an agreement at talks with Russia or a new Russian offensive.**
- **Russia's defence ministry spokesperson, Igor Konashenkov,** said on Tuesday that Russian forces had taken full control of all territory in **Ukraine's southern Kherson region**, Russian news agencies reported.
- **An adviser in the Ukraine government says the war should be over by May** because Russia will run out of resources to keep the invasion going.
- **The leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia are travelling on Tuesday to Kyiv** on a European Union mission to show support for Ukraine as Russia's invasion intensifies.
- **The British Ministry of Defence (MoD) says Russia has reportedly installed its own mayor in the city of Melitopol** after the alleged abduction of his predecessor on Friday.
- **Nearly all of the Russian military offensives in Ukraine remain stalled** after making little progress over the weekend, according to a Pentagon briefing. Russian troops are still about 15km (9 miles) from the centre of Kyiv, a US defence official said, according to a Reuters report.
- **Zelenskiy has used his latest address to urge Russian troops to choose surrender over the "shame" of continuing with the war.** [Speaking partly in Russian](#), he said the war had become a "nightmare" for Russia and that it had now lost more soldiers in Ukraine than during both Chechen wars combined.
- The **Kremlin** said on Tuesday that the actions of **a woman who interrupted a live news bulletin on Russia's state TV Channel One** on Monday to [denounce the war in Ukraine](#) amounted to "hooliganism".
- **UK ministers have imposed a series of new export bans and tariffs on Russian products,** the morning after the passage of the economic crime bill, intended to make it swifter and easier to target oligarchs and Russian interests.
- **Ukraine will make a fresh attempt to deliver supplies to civilians trapped in the encircled city of Mariupol on Tuesday,** the deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk, said.
- **Turkey's foreign minister said he expected to evacuate citizens from Ukraine's southern port city of Mariupol** on Tuesday or Wednesday, he told reporters after a phone call with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov.
- **The EU has this morning formally agreed to a fourth package of sanctions, including an asset freeze and travel ban on Roman Abramovich.** The full details are expected to be published in the Official Journal of the European Union later today.
- **Abramovich, the Chelsea FC owner, is described as a "Russian oligarch who has long and close ties to Vladimir Putin",** in a copy of the EU's legal text relating to its latest sanctions package.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Boris Johnson has urged the west to end its “addiction” to Russian fuel</b> as he heads for Saudi Arabia in a push for increased oil output.</li> <li>• <b>Almost 89,000 people have offered homes to Ukrainian refugees</b> in the first hours of a government scheme that allows families and individuals to bring them to the <b>UK</b>.</li> <li>• <b>Former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder met Abramovich in Moscow for several hours last Thursday</b>, tabloid Bild reports on Tuesday. The purpose of the Gazprom lobbyist’s one-man diplomatic mission, and upon whose request it took place, remains unclear.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 China Covid cases hit 2yr-high: lockdowns</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/china-covid-cases-hit-two-year-high-with-millions-in-lockdown-as-outbreak-spreads">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/china-covid-cases-hit-two-year-high-with-millions-in-lockdown-as-outbreak-spreads</a>
GIST	<p>China has posted a steep jump in daily Covid-19 infections with new cases more than doubling from a day earlier to a two-year high as a virus outbreak expanded rapidly in the north-east.</p> <p>A total of 3,507 domestically transmitted cases with confirmed symptoms were reported on Monday across more than a dozen provinces and municipalities, the National Health Commission said, up from 1,337 a day earlier.</p> <p>Since the coronavirus first emerged in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019, China had successfully suppressed large-scale outbreaks through its <a href="#">strict “zero-Covid” strategy</a>, which involved hard lockdowns that confined huge sections of the population to their homes.</p> <p>While the country’s case load is still tiny by global standards, health experts said the rate of increase in daily cases over the next few weeks would be a crucial factor in determining whether its tough containment approach was still effective against the rapidly spreading Omicron variant.</p> <p>A Covid-19 forecasting system run by Lanzhou University in China’s north-west predicted that the current round of infections would eventually be brought under control in early April after an accumulated total of about 35,000 cases.</p> <p>The university said in its latest assessment published on Monday that while the outbreak was the most serious on the mainland since Wuhan in 2020, China could bring it under control as long as stringent curbs remained in place.</p> <p>At least 11 cities and counties nationwide have been locked down because of the latest surge, including the <a href="#">southern tech hub of Shenzhen</a>, home to 17 million people.</p> <p>In the financial hub of Shanghai, authorities battling an outbreak across the city were cordoning off individual apartment buildings and testing all residents.</p> <p>China’s aviation regulator said that 106 international flights scheduled to arrive in Shanghai would be diverted to other domestic cities from 21 March to 1 May due to Covid.</p> <p>Confirmed symptomatic infections in Shanghai stood at 21 on Monday, including 12 imported from overseas, with an additional 130 asymptomatic cases.</p> <p>Nearly 90% of the mainland’s confirmed new symptomatic cases on Monday were found in the north-eastern province of Jilin, which has <a href="#">banned its 24.1 million population from travelling in and out</a> of the province and across different areas within the province without notifying local police.</p> <p>Jilin officials should step up the preparation of temporary hospitals and designated hospitals and make use of idle venues to ensure all infections and their close contacts were isolated, a local Communist party authority-backed paper said, citing the provincial head of the party.</p>

	<p>An outbreak at Volkswagen Group factories in the Jilin city of Changchun also prompted three sites to shut on Monday for at least three days, according to a spokesman.</p> <p>The number of new asymptomatic cases, which China does not classify as confirmed cases, stood at 1,768 compared with 906 a day earlier. There were no new deaths, leaving the death toll unchanged at 4,636.</p> <p>As of 14 March, mainland China had reported 120,504 cases with confirmed symptoms, including both local ones and those arriving from outside the mainland.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Delays hamper Canada resettle Ukrainians</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/canada-ukraine-russia-visa-settlement-program">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/canada-ukraine-russia-visa-settlement-program</a>
GIST	<p>Canada has promised to resettle an “unlimited” number of displaced Ukrainians, and officials in country’s Prairie region want to be the first choice for those fleeing Russia’s invasion. But despite strong public support, bureaucratic delays at the federal level have highlighted the challenge of quickly resettling those fleeing war.</p> <p>The United Nations estimates more than two and a half million people have escaped <a href="#">Ukraine</a> since Russia invaded the country in late February, creating the worst refugee crisis on the European continent since the upheaval of the second world war.</p> <p>While eastern European nations have absorbed the vast majority of refugees, Canada, home to the <a href="#">second largest Ukrainian diaspora</a>, has agreed to resettle as many people as it can amid a mounting humanitarian crisis.</p> <p>“We will allow [Ukrainians] to study, work, when they come here,” Justin Trudeau told reporters during a trip to Poland last week. “Many of them will hope to be able to return to Ukraine after this conflict, many will also choose to continue their lives in Canada, and we look forward to welcoming as many as we can.”</p> <p>The federal government has created a <a href="#">new visa system</a>, permitting Ukrainians to stay in Canada for as long as two years – but those looking to travel won’t receive federal government support afforded to many refugees.</p> <p>Instead, new arrivals will probably have to rely on the generosity of Canadians to get settled.</p> <p>“There’s a huge outpouring of support for hosting families right now,” said Ostap Skrypnyk, a member of the Manitoba chapter of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and vice-president of the Canada Ukraine Foundation.</p> <p>The Congress has been so overwhelmed with interest in helping resettle families that it had to temporarily pause the process after receiving more than 700 applications in less than 48 hours.</p> <p>“And these people are signing up to help not even knowing what will be asked of them.”</p> <p>Last week, Saskatchewan’s minister of immigration said his government wanted to make the province the first choice for Ukrainians, announcing hundred of thousands in funding to help the resettlement process. Saskatchewan has one of the largest Ukrainian populations in Canada, with 13% of residents identifying with Ukrainian heritage, many of whose ancestors came to farm the land under government programs in previous decades.</p> <p>Despite popular support for resettlement, Canada’s recent failure to resettle tens of thousands of Afghan refugees as promised has prompted concern its pledge for “unlimited” Ukrainians might fall short. Since early March, Canada has <a href="#">resettled only 8,580 of the promised 40,000</a> Afghan refugees since the country was taken over by Taliban forces in August 2021.</p>



	<p>“Will the visa system be inundated when it goes live next week? Will it be able to hold and will they be able to really process people in a timely manner?” said Skrypyk. “We’ll just have to wait and see. But when you build up new architecture, there are always blips.”</p> <p>Federal immigration minister Sean Fraser told CBC News that his department can “do more than one thing at a time” amid worry the government’s recent focus on Ukraine would once again delay those efforts to aid Afghans and also slow down new visa applications.</p> <p>Once families are approved, documents will be issued in as little as two weeks, meaning the first wave could arrive in early April.</p> <p>“Seeing images of war and this huge influx of people in Poland and Slovakia, there’s been this sense of helplessness in the Ukrainian community here,” said Skrypyk.</p> <p>“And so when these first families began arriving, there’s finally something we can do for them. We can help.”</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/15 Increase in gas prices begins to slow</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3395162/washington-increase-gas-prices-begins-to-slow/">https://mynorthwest.com/3395162/washington-increase-gas-prices-begins-to-slow/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Although gas prices across the Seattle area and Washington state have continued to rise steadily in recent weeks, that growth finally started to slow in recent days.</p> <p>In the first week of March, gas prices in the Seattle metropolitan area — covering Seattle, Everett, and Bellevue — rose from \$4.18 a gallon to to \$4.63, before ballooning to \$4.89 just three days after that.</p> <p>Four days later, the region’s gas prices appear to have stabilized slightly, having settled around \$4.91 a gallon as of Tuesday morning, with single-cent increases in each of the last four days.</p> <p>According to AAA, that slowing can at least be partially attributed to a decrease in the price of crude oil, having fallen from \$123 a barrel following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to just under \$110 as of Monday, March 14.</p> <p>But while declining crude oil prices could continue to “remove some of the extreme upward price pressures consumers have found at the pump,” AAA notes, there’s still no guarantee that this trend will hold long-term.</p> <p>“It bears reminding that the cost of oil accounts for about 50% of what drivers pay at the pump,” AAA spokesperson Andrew Gross said in a recent news release. “This war is roiling an already tight global oil market and making it hard to determine if we are near a peak for pump prices, or if they keep grinding higher. It all depends on the direction of oil prices.”</p> <p>Statewide, Washington is averaging \$4.74 a gallon, the fourth most of any state behind California (\$5.75), Hawaii (\$4.99), and Nevada (\$4.96). A month ago, the state sat just below \$4 a gallon, while prices were down around \$3.27 at this time last year.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/15 Report: SPD needs repair erosion of trust</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3393687/oig-report-erosion-trust-spd-protesters/">https://mynorthwest.com/3393687/oig-report-erosion-trust-spd-protesters/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>A newly-released report from Seattle’s Office of the Inspector General issues a series of recommendations to the city’s police department, stemming from June 2020 protests near the East Precinct on Capitol Hill.</p> <p>The 73-page report is based on protests that took place between June 2–7, 2020, pointing to a fractured relationship between demonstrators and law enforcement, while detailing a series of proposed steps to restore that trust.</p>



The OIG panel — comprised of community members and SPD officers — tasked with compiling the report also came to a handful of conclusions, centered on “the continued erosion of trust and constructive dialogue between SPD and community.” In the context of protests in June of 2020, that was believed to be the result of barricades creating so-called “hot spots” for conflict between police and demonstrators, and how SPD’s use of less lethal weapons resulted in “potentially dangerous and unintended consequences to bystanders,” with exhaustion on the part of officers who had been working extended shifts with no time off also cited as an additional factor at play.

“Without working with protesters to understand their goals and work toward a mutually agreed upon solution, the department continued to make tactical decisions that did not de-escalate the situation,” the report reads.

That all culminated in what the panel described as “reactive (rather than proactive) tactics” on the part of police, which only further served to escalate tensions, it concluded.

Moving forward, the report recommends action covering four categories: community legitimacy, situational awareness, communication and community engagement, and tactics and equipment.

For reestablishing community legitimacy, it points to a need to address “the gap between what SPD may be permitted to do by law or policy, and what its officers need to do to meet the standards of justice expected by the community.”

That then feeds into the idea of establishing better situational awareness, where the panel says SPD needs to “change its mindset” when it comes to protests, “moving from a mindset of crowd management and control to one of crowd facilitation and crowd safety.”

The hope is to have that lead to improved lines of communication between police and protesters, both before and after demonstrations take place, while gaining a better understanding of “how arrests or uses of force on individuals committing low level offense can result in the escalation of tensions rather than calming the crowd.”

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Read the full report at [this link](#).

HEADLINE	<b>03/16 Russia war on Ukraine transforms Europe</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-war-on-ukraine-transforms-europe-but-hard-decisions-lie-ahead-11647423003">https://www.wsj.com/articles/russias-war-on-ukraine-transforms-europe-but-hard-decisions-lie-ahead-11647423003</a>
GIST	<p>The shock of <a href="#">Russia's invasion of Ukraine</a> has shaken Europe's democracies out of their complacency about geopolitical dangers. And the speed with which the European Union joined the U.S. in <a href="#">sanctioning Russia</a> and <a href="#">arming Ukraine</a> surprised the world.</p> <p>Turning the initial European reaction into long-term strategies for the continent's military and economic security is the hard part. EU leaders last week agreed on the goals of revamping military defenses and <a href="#">decoupling energy supplies from Russia</a> to contain <a href="#">Moscow's expansionism</a>. How fast to move, and how to pay for it, are the subjects of debates now taking shape.</p> <p>Among the obstacles to rapid change are national differences within the EU and fears about economic vulnerabilities. But the direction is set, given the horrors of <a href="#">the war in Ukraine</a> and the consensus that Russian President <a href="#">Vladimir Putin</a> is a threat to European order, most observers say.</p> <p>“As long as public opinion is so strongly behind Ukraine, it's very difficult for European leaders to backtrack. We're moving towards a total isolation of Russia,” said Finland's former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb.</p>

Compared with the EU's struggles to find common answers in previous crises, from sovereign debt to Covid-19, "this is probably the best crisis management the EU has ever done. When it's a big crisis, the EU goes big," Mr. Stubb said.

Mr. Putin's quest to rewrite the outcome of the Cold War with bombs is likely to change Europe more profoundly than any event since the fall of the Berlin Wall, turning a bloc focused on economics into an all-round geopolitical actor. How fast such changes come depends on whether the current sense of urgency runs into the sands of political inertia—and on whether Mr. Putin escalates the war.

An EU leaders' summit in Versailles late last week showed that the region still needs time to agree on far-reaching overhauls. "The war in Ukraine is an immense trauma," and a spur "to completely redesign the architecture of our Europe," said the summit's host, French President Emmanuel Macron. He called for greater national and EU investments in energy, defense, food security and strategic industries.

The question of who will pay for strengthening Europe in those areas showed the persistence of internal divisions. Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden led opposition to France and Italy's push for common EU funding. The northern countries want to rely on national resources and existing EU budgets.

"Everybody was flabbergasted by how fast the first response was, how Europe got its act together. But now you see some signs of a return to navel-gazing and older divides over who is going to foot the bill," said Catherine De Vries, political science professor at Bocconi University in Milan.

Others say the debate is just beginning. "Versailles was only the first discussion in building alignment among leaders about Europe's strategic priorities," said Mujtaba Rahman, European head at political-risk consulting firm Eurasia Group. "The aim was to get a consensus among leaders about the goals and the need for investment in those areas. Now the question is how to finance it."

"Germany's position of 'every country for themselves' is not sustainable," Mr. Rahman said. "Not all countries have the same fiscal space. The plan needs an EU dimension to be credible."

On Tuesday, EU countries [agreed on a further set of economic sanctions](#) against Russia, including curbs on energy-sector investments. The latest measures are less tough than Poland and some others wanted; Germany was among those advocating a more piecemeal approach.

Germany embodies how the EU's response to the war has been decisive on some points but cautious on others.

When Russia's attack on Ukraine began, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called it "a watershed in the history of our continent," [suspended a new Russian natural-gas pipeline](#) and announced an extensive program of German rearmament. Berlin's U-turns also included sending weapons to Ukraine and backing [EU sanctions against Russian banks](#).

But Berlin has led opposition to sanctioning the bloc's biggest business with Russia: [buying oil and gas](#). Instead, EU leaders agreed last week to wean the region off Russian energy in the medium term. "The EU's plan is realistic. Nobody views the Russians as a reliable supplier any more," said Alexander Clarkson, lecturer in European studies at King's College London.

A debate in Germany among lawmakers, economists, energy experts and foreign-policy analysts centers on whether the country should simply boycott Russian oil and gas. On Monday, German Economy Minister Robert Habeck said a full boycott would cause "deep economic and social damage," painting a bleak picture of Germans losing their jobs and being unable to heat their homes or pay for electricity. Some German economists agree but others challenge the point, saying Europe's biggest economy could handle it.

The war in Ukraine is already reviving the region's other major institution, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Diagnosed by Mr. Macron as suffering from "brain death" in 2019, NATO is now seen as

vital again in all of its European member states. Relations between European capitals and the Biden administration have improved compared with the tensions last year over Washington's abrupt decision to withdraw from Afghanistan.

But many European leaders are nervous about the unpredictability of U.S. politics. France, in particular, argues that Europe needs to strengthen its defense capabilities to insure itself against the risk of U.S. disengagement from Europe.

"Right now, the Europeans are dealing with partners in the U.S. who have a strong commitment to Europe, but there is no certainty about what future U.S. presidents will do," said Mr. Clarkson.

The war is redrawing politics in Europe in other ways, too. It has brought the EU's eastern and western members closer together, as countries cooperate to deliver military aid to Ukraine and opinions on the need to contain Russia converge. For years, former Soviet satellites such as Poland and Estonia warned of Russia as a threat but were dismissed by politicians in Germany, France and Italy who argued for dialogue and trade with Moscow.

The war has strengthened incumbent leaders in some countries. Mr. Macron's support has risen ahead of [France's presidential election](#) in April, making a second term appear all but assured, while some of his challengers have lost voter support because of their history of praising Mr. Putin.

Mr. Scholz has won more approval from Germans since his "watershed" speech. And British Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#)'s hold on power looks more secure as the war has overshadowed [the "partygate" scandal](#) that erupted over how he and his staff held social events while imposing Covid-19 lockdowns on the rest of the country. The war could lead to a rapprochement between the U.K. and continental Europe after tensions about how to implement Brexit. British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace has led London's close cooperation with the U.S. and European countries in arming Ukraine.

"This crisis is reminding Britain of where its strategic center of gravity is," Mr. Clarkson said.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Chernobyl: exhausted staff held at gunpoint</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/inside-chernobyl-200-exhausted-staff-toil-round-the-clock-at-russian-gunpoint-11647357032">https://www.wsj.com/articles/inside-chernobyl-200-exhausted-staff-toil-round-the-clock-at-russian-gunpoint-11647357032</a>
GIST	<p>It was 10 a.m., 16 days into Russia's war on Ukraine, and a land-line phone rang inside the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. The site of the world's worst nuclear-power disaster had become an impromptu prison, and an increasingly dangerous one.</p> <p>The signalman on duty lifted the receiver and passed the call to shift supervisor Valentin Heiko, a veteran of the defunct facility. Mr. Heiko told managers on the other end of the line that the 210 technicians and support staff were in a desperate situation, held hostage while keeping watch over thousands of spent fuel rods.</p> <p>The night before had brought another standoff between the exhausted technicians responsible for safeguarding the nuclear waste and the Russian soldiers who have been holding them on the job at gunpoint since the first hours of the war.</p> <p>"The psychological situation is deteriorating," Mr. Heiko said, updating managers in an office 30 miles away, two people on that call recalled. Some technicians, demanding to go home, were threatening to walk out, past the Russian tanks parked outside.</p> <p>The supervisor, who celebrated his 60th birthday in captivity last week, said it was his duty to toil on as long as required. "Everyone wants to go home, but we know we need to stay."</p>

Since Feb. 23, Chernobyl's technicians and support staff have been working nonstop. After arriving at 9 p.m. for a single night shift to monitor electrical transmission levels and the temperature inside the plant's gigantic sarcophagus housing radioactive waste, they are approaching 500 hours on the job—snatching sleep on chairs in front of beeping machinery and on piles of clothes next to workstations.

Their diet has dwindled to porridge and canned food, prepared by a 70-year-old cook who at one point collapsed from exhaustion. Their phones have been confiscated and they are trailed by Russian soldiers through the nuclear plant's labyrinth of reinforced-concrete corridors.

For weeks, the world's nuclear energy regulators have been trying to understand what is happening inside the Chernobyl complex, where the condition of the facility and its crew has been shrouded by competing Ukrainian and Russian narratives.

The Wall Street Journal heard from workers trapped inside, reviewed videos and texts they sent to family members and spoke to more than a dozen relatives, friends, plant managers and local officials. The Journal was also able to access recordings of a daily 10 a.m. phone call, which connects the plant to an office in the town of Slavutych, built by the Soviet Union to house Chernobyl workers after the disastrous explosion of Reactor No. 4 in 1986.

The picture that emerges is of a skeleton crew of nuclear technicians that has been working under duress for nearly three weeks. One has a thyroid problem and needs medicine, as do several with high blood pressure. In the one-minute calls Russian soldiers allow workers to place to family members, they have told of extreme fatigue, dizziness, nausea and terrible headaches.

That exhaustion is mutating into rebellion, with staff members arguing with their captors over the nature of Russia's war and staging acts of defiance. Every morning at 9, the national anthem, 'Ukraine Has Not Yet Perished,' blares through the loudspeaker. The Ukrainian workers stand, palms pressed to chests, then return to work.

Their families, meanwhile, are running low on heat and power, trapped by a Russian military encirclement around the Atomic City, as Slavutych is known, where locals clang church bells or honk car horns to sound the alarm whenever warplanes approach. Their calls for a safe corridor to evacuate the exhausted Chernobyl workers and replace them with other staff are backed by Ukraine's government but rejected by Russia.

"I didn't recognize his voice," said the wife of a plant worker who spoke to her husband on Friday. "I could tell someone was standing behind him. Very short phrases."

Ukraine's intelligence agency said on Friday that Russia was preparing a false-flag attack on the exclusion zone—the thousand-square-mile, mostly uninhabited area around the plant—in order to blame Ukraine as a pretext for escalating the war. Russian state media said Ukraine was close to building a plutonium-based "dirty bomb" at Chernobyl. Neither side provided evidence for its claims.

Chernobyl stopped producing electricity around 2000, yet it still needs staff to keep cool water circulating over thousands of spent fuel rods kept in four-story-deep basins lined with steel and reinforced concrete.

The pumps pushing new water over the spent nuclear fuel now rely on diesel generators. High-voltage power lines connecting the plant's cooling system to the electricity grid were cut during fighting.

"If the pumps do not work," a memo by a Ukrainian nuclear association official reads, "the water in the pool may boil, which will lead to the formation of radioactive steam, followed by the melting of the fuel assemblies, which will lead to a severe accident."

On Wednesday, Ukrainian officials said that could happen in as little as seven days.

Nuclear analysts based in the West say such a disaster is unlikely. “Chernobyl’s spent fuel has cooled down after decades in storage and cannot melt down at this point,” American Nuclear Society President Steven Nesbit said in a written statement.

A more pressing concern, debated by nuclear analysts, is whether the power outage at Chernobyl could compromise its ventilation system, exposing the staff to risky levels of radiation.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said while the condition of the trapped workers is of grave concern, there is no cause for immediate alarm. The rods are stored in enough water to keep the nuclear material from overheating, it said. The agency is more worried about the potential for an accident at Ukraine’s still-active six-reactor Zaporizhzhia plant, the largest in Europe, where a fire broke out this month after Russian troops shelled nearby.

The emergency playing out at Chernobyl is a hostage crisis. Nuclear experts can’t think of a precedent in their highly regulated industry for a small crew being forced to work for weeks at gunpoint. Three weeks in, the crew has worked almost twice as long as the firefighters who put out a 10-day blaze after the Chernobyl disaster.

“Even in the acute phase after 1986, the workers had breaks for safety,” said Serhiy Myrnyy, who was a commander of a radiation reconnaissance platoon, part of the 600,000-strong Soviet deployment of soldiers, firefighters and others sent to clean up after the accident and contain the radiation. “The situation now that the plant is occupied is incredibly dangerous,” he said.

The most senior members of the staff trapped inside Chernobyl have dedicated decadeslong careers to managing the 36-year aftermath of the accident. The meltdown that followed expelled 400 times as much radioactive material into the planet’s atmosphere as the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

The Soviet Union said little about the incident until a cloud of radioactive fallout stretched across Europe to as far away as Canada.

It dispatched firefighters and rescue workers to put out the blaze and to shovel radioactive debris into the skeletal remains of the ruined reactor. To this day, the government of Ukraine, which in 1986 was part of the Soviet Union, pays stipends to 36,000 widows of people considered to have died from exposure to radiation.

The accident, former Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev has written, was “perhaps the main cause of the Soviet Union’s collapse five years later.”

In February, workers began to get nervous about the swelling number of soldiers across the border of Belarus. On Feb. 23, the night crew decided to forgo the train ride between the Atomic City and Chernobyl, which passes through Belarus without immigration checks, and instead drove to their 12-hour shift.

At 4:58 a.m. on Feb. 24, the Chernobyl shift manager, Mr. Heiko, got a call from the neighboring town of Pripyat: They’d heard shots. A gun battle was under way in the exclusion zone between Ukrainian border guards and the Russian army.

At 5:55 a.m., an operational announcement came in: Residents of the area were evacuating.

The staff debated whether to abandon their shift. “It all happened very suddenly, you know, like at the beginning of World War II,” Mr. Heiko would later say, in an audio message reviewed by the Journal. “It was not clear what to do... There was no protocol in case of war.”

Mr. Heiko called a general director overseeing the plant, and the two made a decision: The night shift would stay on to control the temperature of water cooling the spent fuel rods.

They continued logging temperature and humidity readings until 3 p.m., when the plant director called to say a column of tanks and armored personnel carriers was moving in the area. The Russians seemed to be lost, using old maps, the director said, and their tanks were kicking up radioactive dust.

Shortly after, Mr. Heiko looked out of his window and saw a Russian T-72 tank. Russian troops were taking position in a battle line outside the building. The lightly armed Ukrainian national guard inside told the staff they were ready to fight, but after deliberations decided to negotiate to avoid a gunbattle. In Slavutych, senior plant managers watched as a live closed-circuit TV feed from the plant showed Russian tanks barricading the road.

More Russians, arriving in five trucks, disembarked, their officers announcing they had received an order to take control of the plant. They appointed soldiers to guard the staff, took over the second story of the cafeteria and took down the plant's Ukrainian flag.

Mr. Heiko scooped it up and stored it in his office.

Early on, a Russian state news crew arrived to film the soldiers delivering bread and other provisions to plant workers, but a call came over the loudspeaker from a senior Ukrainian technician: "Do not allow yourselves to be filmed for propaganda."

The soldiers put on blue overalls and posed as workers for the news segment. Some viewers spotted the ruse: The overalls bore the logo of French consortium Novarka, which stopped working at Chernobyl in 2018.

As two days blurred into three, staff sneaked off to make cellphone calls to family members and the Ukrainian energy ministry. "They can't go anywhere without a military man following them, but for a few days they could call us secretly," said a senior adviser at the energy ministry. Then the Russians demanded the staff hand over their phones.

By regulation, each morning, the crew was meant to record the night's events in a logbook, informing the incoming shift of any occurrences or concerns. Now, the staff formally signed off—and then on again, transferring their shifts from themselves to themselves. Then on the intercom came the same joke: "Another permanent shift has taken place."

Conditions in the Atomic City were turning grim. Surrounded by Russian forces, it was running low on food and fuel. Relatives had little word of their loved ones confined at the plant.

Unable to heat their homes or ovens, locals began to cook outside on campfires, and people hunched over diesel generators outdoors to charge their phones.

By March 9, Chernobyl itself was depending on diesel generators. Lights dimmed in the cavernous facility. Systems transmitting data from the radioactive-waste facility went offline. In Slavutych, family members began to panic.

From Kyiv, Ukraine's government put out an alert: There were only 48 hours before the diesel generator ran out of fuel.

In Vienna, the IAEA said it was concerned, but added that it saw "no critical impact on safety." Later in the day, the agency reported it was no longer receiving monitoring data from Chernobyl and warned that the power cut would create stress for the staff. The following day, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi flew to peace talks in the Turkish city of Antalya to petition both sides to agree to safeguard Ukraine's nuclear safety. In Washington, the U.S. activated its nuclear incident response team.

Back in the Atomic City, the plant's management had no answers for Mr. Heiko, who called each morning to ask if there had been a resolution—or at least a fresh supply of cigarettes. Last week, the plant's management wrote him a note of congratulations for his 60th birthday.



	<p>“He can’t hand over his shift and can’t leave his post, he stays at his workplace just as his colleagues did at the time of the biggest nuclear accident in 1986,” it said.</p> <p>The plant’s off-duty management say their co-workers exemplify the Chernobyl tradition of self-sacrifice.</p> <p>“This is not the first emergency that has occurred here,” one manager said. “Our people are hardened.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/16 Russia drone flights into NATO skies</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-drone-flights-into-nato-skies-test-alliances-red-lines-11647426550">https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-drone-flights-into-nato-skies-test-alliances-red-lines-11647426550</a>
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS—The crossing of Russian drones into the airspace of NATO countries is emerging as a test of the alliance’s red lines and its support to Ukraine in repelling Russian invaders <a href="#">without triggering a wider war</a>.</p> <p>Ukraine’s military said Tuesday it downed a Russian drone as the unmanned aerial vehicle returned after crossing into Polish airspace. Russia hasn’t commented on the incident. Earlier this week, another drone suspected of belonging to the Russian military crashed in Romania. Allied officials have said they are studying the incident.</p> <p>“We are very closely monitoring airspace and the border areas around NATO,” Jens Stoltenberg, the head of the alliance, said Tuesday. “Our military commanders also have lines to the Russian commanders to help prevent incidents and accidents, and to help prevent them from spiraling out of control if they happen.”</p> <p>The incidents come as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is on high alert for Russian incursions into alliance territory. NATO defense ministers <a href="#">are meeting Wednesday</a> to discuss plans to reinforce forces in member countries bordering Ukraine, Russia and Belarus.</p> <p>The U.S. has deployed Patriot air-defense batteries to Poland and Germany shipped some to Slovakia, among other moves to reinforce the alliance’s eastern flank. More than 100 combat jets have been deployed along NATO’s eastern border close to Russia. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other NATO leaders have repeatedly said they would protect “every inch” of alliance territory.</p> <p>“There’s always the risk of incidents and accidents,” Mr. Stoltenberg said ahead of Wednesday’s meeting. “Therefore we have to make every effort to prevent such incidents and accidents, and if they happen, to make sure they don’t spiral out of control and create really dangerous situations.”</p> <p>Mr. Stoltenberg declined to comment on the alleged Russian incursion into NATO airspace. Poland’s Defense Ministry declined to comment beyond saying it was “monitoring the situation and taking necessary measures to ensure the security of the country.”</p> <p>The drone appeared to be surveilling a Ukrainian military training center close to the Polish border that was struck by Russian missiles on Sunday, killing at least 35 people, Ukraine’s military said.</p> <p>Russian drones are increasingly conducting reconnaissance near the Ukrainian border, as well as that between Poland and Belarus, a senior Western intelligence official said. “We have reliable indications of this, based on the position and range of drones we see.”</p> <p>Romania’s response to the drone crash on its territory also has been muted. A Defense Ministry official said civilian authorities are investigating the area where the drone went down.</p> <p>The Western intelligence official said the drone crash in Romania suggests Russia is attempting to conduct reconnaissance in the far-west Ukraine. The crash came shortly after Russian officials issued warnings about Western countries providing military support to Kyiv that passes through western Ukraine.</p>

If Russian drones entered NATO airspace, they may have been testing the alliance's air defenses. They also could have been badly piloted or had navigation problems. A senior Western diplomat said there was no indication that Russia has been trying to trigger incidents on NATO territory.

"We have not seen any attempt to engage allied forces—quite the opposite," said the diplomat, who added that the drones may have entered NATO airspace due to navigation problems or other faults in their design or production.

Mr. Stoltenberg said NATO forces tracked the flight path of an object that entered Romanian airspace on Sunday. In response, Romanian fighter aircraft scrambled immediately to investigate, and the alliance is reviewing the incident.

U.S. Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith said she wouldn't parse each scenario that could lead an alliance member to invoke the group's most foundational principle, Article 5 of its founding treaty, which enshrines that an armed attack on one represents an attack on all. "We are all prepared to come to the aid of a country, should they feel the need to invoke Article 5," she said.

A surveillance drone entering NATO airspace isn't an armed attack, the senior Western diplomat said.

Spy drones may pose a particular challenge in defining when Russia has crossed a red line. They often aren't armed and don't pose a direct lethal threat. The information they gather, though, can be instrumental in planning an attack.

Days before the Polish and Romanian incidents, another drone, suspected to be of Ukrainian origin, crashed in Croatia, prompting the government there to ask the French military to conduct a surveillance flight of its airspace. That flight showed nothing suspicious, the French military said.

Mr. Stoltenberg said NATO believes the drone wasn't armed, but the incident highlights that with all those drones and planes in the aircraft "there is more risk of incidents and accidents and therefore we need to be extremely vigilant."

Defending against drone incursions, even by relatively unsophisticated models, also poses a challenge. NATO's high-end air-defense systems are optimized to shoot down fighter and bomber planes or even ballistic missiles, not relatively slow, low-flying drones.

"Drones are really small, they are maneuverable, they fly low to the ground. As a result it is hard to identify them and hard to track them," said Arthur Holland Michel, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Council.

Many of the antidrone systems that are being deployed by militaries are relatively short-range and designed to protect specific facilities, he said, not expansive borders such as those separating NATO from Russian forces.

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HEADLINE	03/15 Russia softens Iran demands; reopens deal
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-softens-iran-demands-re-opening-way-for-nuclear-deal-11647382224?mod=hp_lead_pos7">https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-softens-iran-demands-re-opening-way-for-nuclear-deal-11647382224?mod=hp_lead_pos7</a>
GIST	<p>BERLIN—Russia walked back recently made demands on Washington related to the Iran nuclear deal, clearing the way for Tehran and Washington to revive the 2015 agreement, senior western diplomats said.</p> <p>On Tuesday, after Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met in Moscow with his Iranian counterpart, both Mr. Lavrov and Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said Russia wasn't standing in the way of the accord. Russia earlier this month <a href="#">had demanded guarantees</a> from Washington that its economic ties with Iran wouldn't be affected by the Western sanctions imposed on Moscow over Ukraine. The last-minute move</p>

was the driving factor that prevented a deal to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement [over the past 10 days](#), western diplomats have said.

The European Union, which coordinates the talks, announced a break in the negotiations on Friday, blaming “external factors” for preventing a deal that is “essentially ready.”

A senior western diplomat said Tuesday evening that Russia’s chief negotiator at the talks, Mikhail Ulyanov, had informed the EU that Russia would accept narrower guarantees ensuring that Russia could carry out the nuclear work it is mandated to do under the 2015 nuclear deal. That includes a uranium swap with Iran, the redesign of the Fordow nuclear facility and the provision of nuclear fuel to Iranian reactors.

“Russia says happy with guarantees on nuclear projects and not asking for anything else,” said the diplomat, who asked to remain unidentified because of the sensitive nature of the talks. “So we can go ahead with negotiations that are now exclusively US-Iran.”

State Department spokesman Ned Price said Tuesday evening that “we are not going to sanction Russia for undertaking, for participating in nuclear projects that are part of the” nuclear deal.

The negotiations, which have taken place for almost a year now, aim to reach agreement on the steps Washington and Tehran will take to return into compliance with the 2015 agreement, which lifted most international sanctions on Tehran in exchange for tight but temporary restrictions on Iran’s nuclear work.

After the Trump administration took the U.S. out of the accord and reimposed sweeping sanctions on Iran, saying the accord was too weak, Tehran expanded its nuclear work and has now [gathered almost enough nuclear high-grade enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon](#), according to the United Nations nuclear agency.

Iran says its nuclear program is purely peaceful and U.S. officials have said there is no evidence Iran has decided to build a nuclear weapon.

Over the weekend, a senior U.S. official told The Wall Street Journal that only “a handful of issues left” remained between the U.S. and Iran to reach an accord, mainly on the issue of the scope of sanctions relief Iran would receive from Washington. The official said the U.S. side felt the resolution of these issues was “within reach.”

The U.S. official and senior European diplomats said they wouldn’t negotiate broad carve-outs from Western sanctions over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine with Moscow to save the nuclear deal. They warned that if Russia didn’t back off its demands, they would seek to complete an agreement with Iran, bypassing Russia.

Mr. Ulyanov said Tuesday evening on Twitter it was a lie that Russia had stood in the way of the accord with its demands for guarantees. He added that “some demands were accepted.” Iran, which has friendly ties with Moscow, has also continued to blame Washington for not completing the deal.

Negotiations between the U.S. and Iran could resume without negotiators returning to Vienna, where the talks have been held since April 2021, the senior western diplomat said. Iran so far has refused to talk directly with the Americans and instead have negotiated through the European powers at the talks. With so few issues still to be resolved, negotiators could work from capitals to resolve the remaining differences.

Time is pressing. U.S. and European officials say that Iran’s nuclear work has expanded close to a point that the deal’s main benefit to the West—keeping Iran months away from amassing enough nuclear fuel for a nuclear weapon—would be impossible.

European diplomats in particular have warned that with the war in Ukraine becoming ever-deadlier, the diplomatic window for concluding the deal is closing.

HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Ukraine: 4<sup>th</sup> Russia general killed in fighting</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/oleg-mityaev-russian-general-killed-ukrainian-troop/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/oleg-mityaev-russian-general-killed-ukrainian-troop/</a>
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine — Ukraine said a fourth Russian general has been killed in the fighting.</p> <p>Maj. Gen. Oleg Mityaev died Tuesday during the storming of Mariupol, said Ukrainian Interior Ministry adviser Anton Gerashchenko, who published a photo on Telegram of what he said was the dead officer.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reported the death of another Russian general in his nighttime address but didn't name him.</p> <p>Mityaev, 46, commanded the 150th motorized rifle division and had fought in Syria, Gerashchenko said.</p> <p>There was no confirmation of the death from Russia.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Illegal immigration border crossings 'uptick'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/mexicans-surged-illegal-immigration-border-rose-fe/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/mexicans-surged-illegal-immigration-border-rose-fe/</a>
GIST	<p>The number of migrants caught crossing the southern border illegally rose in February as single adult Mexicans poured into the country at their highest rate in years, according to new Homeland Security data released Tuesday.</p> <p>All told, Customs and Border Protection tallied 164,973 encounters with unauthorized migrants last month, up about 7% compared to January.</p> <p>CBP Commissioner Chris Magnus called the increase — which works out to more than 10,000 additional people in February, a shortened month — a “slight uptick.”</p> <p>Of those caught, 71,210 were Mexican. That's up more than 40% compared to just a couple of months ago.</p> <p>Mr. Magnus said the majority of people caught at the border were quickly expelled under the pandemic health emergency order that the Trump administration implemented and which the Biden administration has kept largely in place.</p> <p>Among the worrying signs in the data was the number of migrant children traveling without parents. The Border Patrol reported catching 11,810, a 37% increase over January, reversing what had been one of the few bright spots on the border.</p> <p>Agents caught about 25,000 parents and children traveling as families, down about half compared to December.</p> <p>Other yardsticks of border security also trended in the wrong direction, with heroin seizures spiking 173% in February. Cocaine seizures were up 83%, and methamphetamine seizures rose 97%. But fentanyl, which has been shattering records, actually dropped 21%.</p> <p>Authorities say increases in people and drugs being seized means more people and drugs are getting through.</p> <p>Sen. Rob Portman, the top Republican on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, said he was “alarmed” by the trend line.</p> <p>He was worried by the surge in drug trafficking, which is costing a record number of lives.</p> <p>“This crisis is a direct result of the Biden administration's policy choices,” Mr. Portman said.</p>

	<p>The Border Patrol has tallied nearly 2.2 million arrests at the southern border since President Biden took office.</p> <p>By contrast, during the same 13-month period in President Trump's term, agents recorded only about 272,000 arrests.</p> <p>And before Mr. Biden, it had been 15 years since the U.S. last recorded even a single month with more than 150,000 apprehensions. February marked the 12th straight month of CBP encounters exceeding 150,000.</p> <p>RJ Hauman, head of government relations at the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said the Biden administration has made mass illegal migration "the new normal."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/15 Russia strikes back; sanctions US officials</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/russia-strikes-back-sanctions-biden-hunter-biden-h/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/russia-strikes-back-sanctions-biden-hunter-biden-h/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>The Russian Foreign Ministry on Tuesday hit back at the massive economic measures imposed by the Biden administration by announcing sanctions against President Biden, his son Hunter and other top U.S. figures.</p> <p>Russia also slapped the financial and travel sanctions on Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, CIA Director William J. Burns, White House press secretary Jen Psaki and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.</p> <p>"It won't surprise any of you that none of us are planning tourist trips to Russia and none of us have bank accounts that we won't be able to access, so we will forge ahead," Ms. Psaki said in response to Moscow's tit-for-tat sanctions.</p> <p>Mrs. Clinton also took the punitive action from Moscow in stride. "I want to thank the Russian Academy for this Lifetime Achievement Award," she joked in a tweet.</p> <p>Deputy National Security Adviser Daleep Singh, USAID Director Samantha Power, Export-Import Bank Chairman Reta Jo Lewis, and Deputy Treasury Secretary Adewale Adeyemo also made it onto the Kremlin's sanctions list.</p> <p>Under the penalties, these U.S. citizens are prohibited from entering the country and any assets they have in the country will be frozen.</p> <p>In a statement, the Foreign Ministry said the step was "an inevitable consequence of the extremely Russophobic course taken by the current U.S. administration." It also called the sanctions imposed by the U.S. "a desperate attempt to maintain American hegemony."</p> <p>"At the same time, we do not refuse to maintain official relations if they meet our national interests, and, if necessary, we will solve problems arising from the status of persons who appear on the 'black list' to organize high-level contacts," the statement said.</p> <p>Russia vowed to expand the list to include other officials, lawmakers, businessmen, experts, and media who are "Russophobic or contribute to inciting hatred towards Russia."</p> <p>Ms. Psaki laughed off the sanctions at the daily White House press briefing, noting that Russia forgot to include the "Jr." that's part of Mr. Biden's official name.</p> <p>"President Biden is a junior, so they have sanctioned his dad, may he rest in peace," she said.</p>

	<p>The U.S. has hit Moscow with widespread economic penalties targeting Russian banks and government officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and oligarchs with ties to the Kremlin for the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Russia has also been cut off from the global financial system, including being blocked from the SWIFT financial messaging system. Mr. Biden has also banned Russian energy imports and revoked its most favored nation status.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Starbucks to ditch disposable cups</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/starbucks-plans-get-rid-disposable-cups/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/starbucks-plans-get-rid-disposable-cups/</a>
GIST	<p>Starbucks is planning to trade in its instantly recognizable cups for a more environmentally friendly option.</p> <p>The coffee company is shifting from single-use plastics and experimenting with reusable cup programs in several markets worldwide.</p> <p>Customers will be able to use their cups at every Starbucks in the U.S. and Canada — including in-store, drive-thru and mobile orders — by the end of next year, Starbucks said Tuesday.</p> <p>Currently, individual reusable cups are accepted only in-store.</p> <p>Making individual cups available at drive-thrus is essential, as the drive-thru business has increased considerably since the pandemic.</p> <p>Starbucks CFO Rachel Ruggeri said during a February earnings call that drive-thru and mobile orders account for 70% of the company’s sales nationwide.</p> <p>Starbucks hopes the expansion will help lead a cultural shift toward using reusable materials by giving customers easy access to an individual or store-provided cup for every visit.</p> <p>The company says it hopes to reduce waste by 50% by 2030.</p> <p>“We have a bold long-term sustainability vision, and ambitious goals for 2030,” Starbucks President and CEO Kevin Johnson said in a release. “Starbucks partners around the world are passionate about protecting our planet and are at the very center of driving the innovation that enables us to give more than we take from the planet.”</p> <p>The company says it hopes that every customer uses their reusable mug or borrows one from their local store.</p> <p>Starbucks is testing a program in which customers pay a deposit for the reusable cup, take it with them and return it to the store later.</p> <p>“I think that will take the lead,” Amelia Landers, a vice president of product experience, told CNN. “We are testing a number of different [borrow-a-cup] programs around the globe including 20 different iterations and in eight different markets.”</p> <p>Starbucks stopped allowing guests to bring reusable cups during the pandemic but resumed the practice in June 2021.</p> <p>As the company expands the program, it will put extensive health and safety protocols in place, officials said.</p>



	<p>When a customer brings in a reusable cup, they place it in a ceramic mug. An employee handles only the ceramic mug, avoiding contact with the individual's cup. The ceramic mug is washed after each use.</p> <p>"We held extensive trials of the new operating method in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Asia Pacific, which uses a ceramic mug to transport the reusable cup through the bar, to reintroduce reusable cups with confidence," a Starbucks spokesperson told The Washington Times.</p> <p>Kim Davis, who manages a store that tested the program, said customers gave positive feedback after baristas explained the concept.</p> <p>"Customers were just so excited to try something new and my partners had a lot of pride in testing it and giving that feedback to make the program even better," Ms. Davis said. "I do think that everyone does want to contribute to a better world, and if we can help them do that one cup at a time, that is our mission right there."</p> <p>Starbucks is testing the program in the United Kingdom, Japan and Singapore, and plans to add more countries this year.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/15 Producer Price Index hits 10% increase</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/producer-price-index-hits-10-increase-fed-eyes-rat/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/producer-price-index-hits-10-increase-fed-eyes-rat/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Prices paid to U.S. producers rose at an annual rate of 10% in February on higher costs of goods, further highlighting record-setting inflation as the Federal Reserve prepares to raise a key interest rate this week.</p> <p>The Labor Department reported Tuesday that the spike in the producer price index for final demand increased at 0.8% from the prior month, following an upwardly revised 1.2% gain in January.</p> <p>It was the biggest increase in the producer price index since 2009, with energy costs accounting for two-thirds of the rise. High inflation, which began last summer, is expected to persist as Russia's war in Ukraine impacts oil prices.</p> <p>Consumer prices hit an annual rate of 7.9% in February, a 40-year high.</p> <p>The central bank will announce its decision on a rate increase on Wednesday, with Fed Chairman Jerome Powell having predicted a hike of one-quarter percentage point. Raising interest rates is an effort to dampen inflation, but it also leads to higher borrowing costs and generally curbs job growth.</p> <p>High inflation is also a prominent issue in the midterm elections. Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said the Biden administration isn't tackling inflation.</p> <p>"Prices are skyrocketing, real wages continue to fall, and Americans are being left behind in Biden's failed economy," she said. "Biden and the Democrats have no one to blame but themselves and their reckless spending agenda for the highest producer price increase on record. Their failures are devastating to American small businesses, families, and workers."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/16 Ukraine president: possible compromise</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/16/zelenskiy-says-russias-position-in-negotiations-is-becoming-more-realistic-as-fears-deepen-for-mariupol">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/16/zelenskiy-says-russias-position-in-negotiations-is-becoming-more-realistic-as-fears-deepen-for-mariupol</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, has said he sees possible room for compromise in talks with <a href="#">Russia</a> ahead of a fresh round of discussions, despite Moscow's stepped up bombardment Kyiv and as fears for the port city of Mariupol deepened.</p>

“The meetings continue, and, I am informed, the positions during the negotiations already sound more realistic. But time is still needed for the decisions to be in the interests of [Ukraine](#),” Zelenskiy said in a video address early on Wednesday.

“Efforts are still needed, patience is needed,” he said. “Any war ends with an agreement.”

The leading Ukrainian negotiator, presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak, said there were “fundamental contradictions” between the two sides but added that “there is certainly room for compromise.”

Another aide to Zelenskiy, Ihor Zhovkva, said negotiations had become “more constructive” and that Russia had softened its stand by no longer airing its demands that Ukraine surrender. Talks were set to resume via video link on Wednesday.

As the [war approached the end of its third week](#) and heavy shelling of Ukraine’s cities continued, the US president, Joe Biden, signed off on \$13.6bn in aid. Zelenskiy thanked Biden and “all the friends of Ukraine” for the support.

An update from Ukraine’s ministry of defence on Wednesday said the “worst situation remains in the area of Mariupol, where the opponent tries to block the city in the western and eastern outskirts of the city”. It came as the Associated Press reported Russian troops had seized a hospital in Mariupol and took about 500 people hostage during another assault on the southern port city late on Tuesday, regional leader Pavlo Kyrylenko said.

On Wednesday morning, there were reports that a residential tower block had been hit by shelling in Kyiv. The Ukrainian president is due to address US Congress on Wednesday and Nato military commanders will also meet in Brussels to draw up plans for new ways to deter Russia, including more troops and missile defences in eastern [Europe](#), officials and diplomats said.

Ministers will hear from their Ukrainian counterpart, Oleksii Reznikov, who is expected to plead for more weapons from individual Nato countries, as Russian attacks on Ukraine’s cities continue.

Earlier, Zelenskiy acknowledged that [Ukraine](#) would not become a Nato member, in a significant concession on a day when the invading force tightened its grip on the capital.

The leaders of three European Union countries – Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia – [met in Kyiv on Tuesday](#), arriving by train in a bold show of support amid the danger.

In a press conference after the meeting, the Czech prime minister, Petr Fiala, told Ukrainians: “Europe stands with you.”

“The main goal of our visit and the main message of our mission is to say to our Ukrainian friends that they are not alone,” he added.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/16 Canada, US: Arctic military exercises</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/16/canada-us-arctic-military-exercises-russia">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/16/canada-us-arctic-military-exercises-russia</a>
GIST	<p>Canada and the US have issued a rare public notice over planned military exercises in the <a href="#">Arctic</a> amid growing concern over Russian aggression.</p> <p>The North American Aerospace Defense Command said on Tuesday that it would hold air defence exercises throughout the Canadian Arctic, adding that the drills were meant to test the ability to “respond to both aircraft and cruise missiles” threatening the continent.</p> <p>Operation Noble Defender has been a recurring event in recent years, but the drills have taken on new meaning in the weeks since Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.</p>

Speaking at a defence conference before the operation, Canada's top soldier said that while the threat of a Russian incursion into Canada's Arctic was low at the moment, he would not rule it out in years to come.

Gen Wayne Eyre, the chief of defence staff, said it was "not inconceivable that our sovereignty may be challenged" from the Arctic region and that [Canada](#) needed to closely watch Russian action elsewhere.

In recent years, Russia has increased its military presence in land bases in the Arctic, and launched a string of provocative aerial missions. Two years ago, a pair of long-range Russian bombers buzzed Canadian airspace before turning back. The TU-160 Blackjack bombers, capable of carrying nuclear missiles, crossed the North Pole and approached Canada from western Russia.

Experts agree that any overt military aggression in the Arctic would probably take the form of attacks from the air and sea, rather than the land. Russia has [previously tested hypersonic missiles](#) that would be difficult, if not impossible, to detect with much of the current technology deployed in the Arctic.

Moscow's brazen attack on Ukraine three weeks ago has renewed worries the Russian president has become increasingly unpredictable – and raising tensions in other regions where Russia has shown signs of aggression.

"If Putin were rational, it'd be a different story," said the retired Canadian colonel Pierre Leblanc, who spent years overseeing troops in the northern reaches of the country. "But he's forcing us to destroy his country's economy. And despite all the threats, all the sanctions, he continues to bomb civilian targets, and commit war crimes."

Despite the vulnerabilities of the region, Leblanc said successive Canadian governments had failed to modernize early warning systems and neglected the development of military bases and deep water ports.

He pointed out a gap of 2,800km between Inuvik and Iqaluit, the two forward operating locations for Canada's F-18 planes, leaving vast swaths of land and sea exposed and difficult to patrol.

At the same time, the technology behind short-range radar used to guard the region is "largely obsolete" and that parts used in repairs are no longer manufactured.

"If you placed all of continental Europe in the Canadian Arctic, there'd be room to spare. So when we sending out monitoring ships, it would be the equivalent of sending out two ships to monitor all of Europe. If you suggested that, you'd be laughed out of the room."

In recent years, Leblanc has become a strong advocate for developing a base and deep water port in Resolute Bay and believes greater investment in the region would create jobs for Inuit communities.

Earlier this month, the Inuit-run Nasittuq Corporation was announced as the winner of a C\$592m (US\$464m) contract to operate the North Warning System, a 37-year-old network of dozens of remotely operated radar stations stretching more than 5,000km along the edge of the Arctic Ocean. The radar system functions as a critical set of eyes on the region's airspace but needs significant upgrades.

But Michael Byers, a professor of political science at the University of British Columbia who focuses on Arctic issues, argued that Russia had little incentive to show aggression in the Canadian Arctic.

"[It's] the largest country in the world and it has considerable Arctic resources of its own. There's nothing in Canada that Russia doesn't have," he said. He added that Moscow knew that any military interference in the Canadian Arctic could be a "tripwire into a full-blown" conflict with Nato.

Instead, he said, Canada and allies should focus on the European Arctic, where Russia has a network of submarines capable of launching nuclear missiles.

	<p>“The idea that we need to be worried about a Russian invasion strikes me as misleading, because we know where the real concern is,” said Byers. “The real concern is in Europe, today.”</p> <p>Still, Leblanc said the recent events in Ukraine had highlighted the importance of planning for future events, even if the odds of military attacks remained low.</p> <p>“We have very little resources to actually look after a beautiful part of our country,” he said. “Ukrainians are dying for their land. We barely protect ours.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Mariupol struggles to account for the dead</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/europe/mariupol-death-toll-ukraine.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/europe/mariupol-death-toll-ukraine.html</a>
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine — With some residents crushed in the rubble from a relentless two-week onslaught by Russian forces, and others dying in freezing conditions with no heat, food or clean water, officials in the besieged coastal city of Mariupol are struggling to account for the number of dead and missing.</p> <p>Officially, 2,400 civilians killed in the city have been identified, but Pyotr Andryushchenko, an adviser to the city government, said he believed the toll was far higher.</p> <p>“We have inaccurate data on civilians killed,” he said <a href="#">in an interview with Current Time, a Ukrainian radio station</a>. He said the official figure represented a “small handful” of those killed and estimated that the actual total could be as high as 20,000.</p> <p>In a telephone interview with The New York Times later, Mr. Andryushchenko said that 2,000 vehicles had managed to escape the city on Tuesday and that another 2,000 were packed and ready to leave. Officials told civilians hoping to leave to “delete all messengers and photos from phones” in case Russian soldiers tried to search them for signs of support for Ukrainian forces.</p> <p>A battleground since the first hours of the war, Mariupol is under an increasingly relentless assault that is taking an unspeakable toll. Ukrainian estimates for the number of civilians trapped in the city have ranged from 200,000 to 400,000, with the latest estimate being 300,000.</p> <p>The region’s top official, Pavlo Kyrylenko, who until martial law was declared was its governor, announced that the Russians were also holding doctors and patients of the main intensive care hospital hostage. An estimated 400 people are inside.</p> <p>“It is impossible to get out of the hospital,” Mr. Kyrylenko wrote on Telegram, quoting a message from one of the facility’s employees. “They shoot hard, we sit in the basement. Cars have not been able to drive to the hospital for two days. High-rise buildings are burning around.”</p> <p>Battered by Russian shelling, the city has been overwhelmed by the wounded and dead. Videos shared on Telegram showed residents of the Cheryomushki neighborhood burying a body in a courtyard. Another video showed how local people had turned a post office building into a makeshift morgue, with “MORGUE” spray-painted in large Cyrillic letters on the outside of the ground floor of the building.</p> <p>“Here, in this building of the New Post Office on Cheryomushki, they stack corpses, which in the future they themselves will bury,” a man can be heard saying in the video, which he posted to the Telegram channel Mariupol Now.</p> <p>Russian forces have dropped more than 100 bombs within the city limits, according to a Telegram post by the Mariupol city council, destroying nearly all basic services, even as they battle Ukrainian forces on the outskirts of the metropolis.</p>

	<p>The Kremlin has said that it is Ukrainian forces that are keeping people trapped in the city. The Ukrainian government says that repeated attempts at mass evacuation have failed as they came under attack by Russian forces.</p> <p>There is no completely safe route in or out of the city. The roads are studded with land mines, according to international observers, and the fighting rarely subsides.</p> <p>The Ukrainian Army's high command said on Tuesday that its forces had managed to repel the latest Russian attempt to move into the city, claiming to have destroyed two tanks, seven infantry fighting vehicles and one armored personnel carrier. "After the losses, the occupiers stopped the offensive and retreated," the Ukrainian military said.</p> <p>The Ukrainians noted that their forces had also suffered losses. It is impossible to independently verify almost any information out of Mariupol, as nearly all lines of communication have been severed.</p> <p>Mr. Andriyushchenko, the adviser to the city government, declined to comment in his phone interview with The Times on whether he and the mayor would be evacuating from the city. The mayor's security would likely be of concern: Russian forces kidnapped the mayor of nearby Melitopol and installed a replacement.</p> <p>"We sincerely hope for the safety of our mayor and that our defenders will help ensure it," Mr. Andriyushchenko said. "We know for sure that he will not accept the Russian occupation under any circumstances, will not cooperate with the occupiers and will not recognize any occupation authority."</p> <p>But he was also at a loss for words thinking about the city's future. He has estimated that 80 percent of the residential housing stock has been destroyed. "What kind of city can it be?"</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 India court upholds hijab ban in schools</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/asia/india-hijab-ban-schools.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/asia/india-hijab-ban-schools.html</a>
GIST	<p>A top court in the southern Indian state of Karnataka on Tuesday upheld a government order banning Muslim girls from wearing head scarves inside schools, a ruling that is likely to heighten tensions at a time when India is increasingly polarized along religious lines.</p> <p>The court said that wearing the hijab is not part of essential religious practice under Islam. The ruling came at a time when members of India's minority community are increasingly coming under attack as the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has adopted Hindu-first policies.</p> <p>Religious freedom is protected under the country's Constitution, but there has been a proliferation of religious-based hate crimes, particularly against members of the Muslim community. Their members and right-wing Hindu activists have also been clashing at school campuses around Karnataka.</p> <p>The <a href="#">dispute</a> began in September at a college preparatory school for girls in Udupi, a city in southwestern Karnataka, when teachers there barred several Muslim students from entering their classrooms while wearing hijabs.</p> <p>In previous years, head scarves had not been a problem, according to one of the petitioners who sought to overturn the ban. The school's ban, later affirmed by the state government, set off <a href="#">unrest and violence</a> that spread to other schools in the state, prompting the government to close down schools for days.</p> <p>When the students defied the ban, they were met at the campus by scores of boys wearing saffron, the color most associated with Hinduism, and shouting slogans like "Hail Lord Ram," a major Hindu god.</p> <p>Several of the students' parents filed a petition, which the judges considered before their ruling. The three judges heard arguments from lawyers to overturn the hijab ban, while students' lawyers argued that it</p>

violated the girls' right to an education and their freedom of religion. India's Constitution affirms "the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion."

The court previously issued an intermediate order preventing students from wearing any religious garb, including saffron shawls, until the decision on Tuesday.

Pralhad Joshi, a federal minister of parliamentary affairs, welcomed the court's decision, which is likely to affect thousands of hijab-wearing students in Karnataka, saying that the "basic work of the students is to study."

Mr. Joshi also told the Indian news agency ANI, "Everyone has to maintain peace by accepting the order of the high court."

In recent weeks, the restrictions on students wearing head scarves had become a flash point over minority rights in India. Critics of Mr. Modi say his Bharatiya Janata Party is increasingly taking steps to marginalize the country's 200 million Muslims, one of the largest Muslim populations in the world.

Right-wing Hindu monks have made calls for other Hindus to arm themselves and kill Muslims. And there has been a rise in violence against Muslims in India under Mr. Modi, part of a broader shift in which minorities feel less safe.

Recently, a prominent Muslim member of Parliament survived an apparent assassination attempt while campaigning in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. After the police arrested two people accused of shooting at the lawmaker's vehicle, members of Mr. Modi's party visited the home of a suspect and declared him innocent.

Karnataka, where the hijab controversy is playing out, is controlled by Mr. Modi's party. The students' protest there has inspired Muslim women to march elsewhere in India for their right to wear head scarves and other Islamic clothing.

"The hijab is not a moment where liberty or equality are being tested," wrote Pratap Bhanu Mehta, a columnist for The Indian Express. "It is coming when there is an attempt to visibly erase Muslims from India's public culture."

Karnataka residents said some Muslim women wearing head scarves have been prevented from entering shops or have been chided on public transportation. In another state, a hijab-wearing woman was not allowed to withdraw cash from a bank, Indian news media reported.

"When you board a bus, everyone starts staring at you," said Huzaifa Kulsum, a homemaker in Karnataka who said she had worn the hijab since childhood. "It seems suddenly everyone is interested in knowing why we wear it."

Video footage at some schools in Karnataka showed Muslim students and teachers being directed to remove head coverings before entering the campus. Many parents instead chose not to have their children attend the school.

On Tuesday, the authorities in Karnataka closed schools and colleges for a day and police officers were seen patrolling the streets. Before the court ruling, the regional government banned large gatherings for a week in Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka state, in order "to maintain public peace and order."

The girls who had petitioned the court have decided that they will appeal the ban to India's top court, according to their lawyer, Anas Tanwir.

Aiman Mohiuddin, a student who was among those barred from wearing the hijab at Rotary School in Mandya, a city in Karnataka, said before the verdict that she had felt as if someone was chopping off part of her body.



During the hearings, a top government lawyer told the judges that barring students from wearing the hijab at school did not violate guarantees of religious freedom under the Indian Constitution.

Prabhuling Navadgi, a lawyer representing the Karnataka government, told the court that educational institutions had the right to set school dress rules.

“There is no issue of hijab in the government order,” he said. “The government order is innocuous in nature. It does not affect the petitioners’ rights.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/14 Covid surge prompts lockdowns in China</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/14/world/asia/china-covid-omicron-lockdowns.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/14/world/asia/china-covid-omicron-lockdowns.html</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING — Several of China’s largest factory cities have ordered a lockdown, halting production of Toyota cars and Apple iPhones. Theaters, cinemas and many restaurants have closed in Shanghai. The northeastern province of Jilin on Monday banned its 24 million residents from leaving the province or traveling between cities.</p> <p>China is grappling with its largest surge of Covid-19 infections since the coronavirus first emerged more than two years ago in central China. Sustained outbreaks in two-thirds of the country’s provinces are proving the toughest test yet of China’s zero-tolerance coronavirus policy.</p> <p>Even as countries in the West are now loosening or abandoning mask mandates and other measures, Chinese officials are implementing some of their most stringent methods. That is in large part because China can’t afford to lift restrictions.</p> <p>The government has been concerned about comparatively lower rates of vaccination among China’s older adults. The country also has far fewer intensive care hospital beds compared to its population than most industrialized countries. In China’s vast rural areas, hospitals and medical facilities are often basic, and a major outbreak could quickly overwhelm hospitals.</p> <p>The United States and other Western countries have suffered far higher rates of infection and deaths over the past two years than China, and still have higher rates now. But the seven-day average rate of new cases in mainland China, now at 1,584, has more than quintupled in recent days.</p> <p>For many residents in China, the rapid spread of the virus has been unsettling.</p> <p>“Because of the large number of cases in a short period of time, it is inevitable that there will be some panic all over the country, and Shanghai is no exception,” said Dr. Zhang Wenhong, a prominent infectious disease expert in Shanghai, in a post on his social media account on Monday.</p> <p>China has responded to the current surge in cases by mobilizing its vast Communist Party apparatus to deploy workers and resources. In Jilin Province, where many cases have been recorded, workers are building temporary facilities to house thousands of people who test positive. Across the country, workers are corralling and testing millions of citizens every day. But that testing program is starting to be overwhelmed.</p> <p>“We have noticed that there have been problems such as long lines and slow test results at many testing sites in the past two days,” said Lu Taohong, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Health Commission, at a news conference on Sunday night.</p> <p>China’s virus containment strategy is focused on moving quickly to lock down buildings or neighborhoods. In response to even a single case, officials may seal all the entrances to a store, office building or even convention center. Everyone inside must then stay there for up to several days as they are tested for the coronavirus and sent into isolation if their results are positive.</p>

In Shanghai, many foreign-owned businesses stockpiled mattresses last week in case their employees were trapped in their factories or their offices this week. Multinationals there then told their employees to work from home this week.

In Guangzhou, the municipal government on Friday sealed off the world's largest convention center, which was holding a beauty products exhibition. Videos circulating on Chinese social media platforms showed crowds of stranded convention goers milling around and looking for exits in attempts to evade the lockdown.

The outbreak's rapid spread and the government's tough response have left some residents worried about the effect of lockdowns on their livelihoods.

Li Yanhua, a grocery store manager in Shanghai, was notified on Saturday night that his neighborhood was locked down and residents would have to be tested for Covid.

"It was all of a sudden, we are not even prepared — my family has not enough vegetables and daily necessities," Mr. Li said. "My store is closed, but we still need to pay rent."

Still, such measures have also been widely accepted as necessary for the good of public health.

Li Junyan, a 33-year-old businessman in the locked down city of Changchun in northeastern China, has had to stop shipping fruit and health products to online customers because of travel restrictions but he is philosophical about it. "There must be losses to my business, but there is nothing much I can do," he said.

He and the other three other members of his family have been confined at their apartment since Saturday. "In order not to cause chaos to the society, I'll stay at home for the public's sake."

Faye Li, 27, a brand management specialist at a food company in Shenzhen, said she wanted to spend time downtown over the weekend with two friends but canceled the plan because the government banned indoor dining. But she accepted this.

"The effect of the outbreak is small, and I'm actually not very worried," Ms. Li said. "I've been used to this."

Chinese doctors and health officials insist that continued mass testing, quarantines and lockdowns are necessary. Opening up too soon could be disastrous, they warn.

Many of the cases in recent days have been the Omicron variant, which while highly transmissible, has also tended to make people less sick than earlier variants of the coronavirus. A little more than half of those infected with the coronavirus in recent days in China do not show symptoms, according to data released by the government.

But they are still infectious.

"The proportion of asymptomatic infections is high, the spread is hidden, and early detection is difficult," said Wu Fan, vice dean of Shanghai Medical College at Fudan University, at a government news conference on Sunday. "It is not enough to simply screen in key areas or populations — it is necessary to reduce or slow down the mobility of people."

After scandals involving citywide lockdowns in which people went hungry in their homes or even died for lack of medical care, notably in Xi'an, central government leaders have ordered local officials to use greater caution when imposing such restrictions.

Premier Li Keqiang said in an annual policy speech last week that the goal of China's pandemic policies was "to protect people's life and health, keep up the normal running of work and life, and ensure the security of industrial and supply chains."

But the rapid increase in infections threatens to undo that progress. Dr. Zhang, the Shanghai expert, has been one of the few prominent advocates of easing "Covid zero" precautions, but even he said in an online posting on Monday that now is not the time for that.

"It is very important for our country to continue to adopt the strategy of covid-zero in the society in the near future to suppress the fifth wave of the extremely fast-spreading Omicron epidemic to a completely controllable level," he wrote. "But this does not mean that we will permanently adopt the strategy of citywide lockdown and full testing."

Shenzhen, a vast metropolis of nearly 20 million people that is China's tech center and adjacent to Hong Kong, locked down residents on Sunday night. It stopped buses and subways and ordered businesses to close except for supermarkets, farmers' markets, pharmacies, medical institutions and the port, which is one of the world's largest.

Dongguan, another huge factory city that is next to Shenzhen, imposed a similar lockdown on Monday.

Particularly in southern China, many have reacted to the Omicron outbreak by blaming nearby Hong Kong, where a large epidemic has overwhelmed hospitals and morgues, largely because the vaccination of older residents has lagged.

Hu Xijin, a nationalistic columnist, complained in a post on his social media account on Sunday: "Hong Kong brought down Shenzhen."

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Symbolic: 3 EU PMs travel to Kyiv</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/europe/european-leaders-ukraine-trip.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/europe/european-leaders-ukraine-trip.html</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — The leaders of three eastern members of the European Union traveled to Kyiv on Tuesday on a high-risk mission that was kept under wraps until after they had boarded a train to the embattled Ukrainian capital.</p> <p>Poland's prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, <a href="#">posted photos on Facebook</a> of the men sitting round a table and poring over maps, and the Czech prime minister, Petr Fiala, did the same <a href="#">on Twitter</a>.</p> <p>"It is here, in war-torn Kyiv, that history is being made," Mr. Morawiecki wrote. "It is here, that freedom fights against the world of tyranny. It is here that the future of us all hangs in the balance."</p> <p>Later in the day, Ukrainian media aired video footage of President Volodymyr Zelensky, in what has become his signature khaki green T-shirt and fleece, striding into a meeting room and sitting down with Mr. Morawiecki, Mr. Fiala and the prime minister of Slovenia.</p> <p>"Your visit to Kyiv at this difficult time for Ukraine is a strong sign of support — we appreciate it," Mr. Zelensky said in a statement released with the footage.</p> <p>The photos released by European leaders earlier sought to convey a daring show of support for Ukraine three weeks after Russian troops invaded the country, and as the mayor of Kyiv warned of growing danger for the capital and its inhabitants.</p> <p>The symbolism was powerful.</p>

The Czech and Polish people were subjugated by the former Soviet Union and lived through decades of communist rule. Now, alarm has been growing that President Vladimir V. Putin is seeking to turn back the clock more than 30 years and trying to reclaim the lost Soviet sphere of influence.

The European leaders were reported to have traveled by train from the Polish border, a journey of at least seven hours. Ukrainian officials released few details about the trip.

Ukraine's prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, [writing on Twitter](#) on Tuesday afternoon, embraced the visitors. "The courage of true friends of Ukraine," he said. "Discussing support of Ukraine and strengthening sanctions against Russian aggression."

There was no indication that Moscow had guaranteed safe passage for the prime ministers. Mr. Putin's spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, said that the governments of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia had not been in touch with the Kremlin about Tuesday's trip.

The mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, visiting a burning apartment building hit in one of Tuesday's strikes, applauded the visitors.

"Keep supporting Ukraine," he said, "because we are fighting now not for Ukraine. This war touched everyone in the world, especially the European Union, the European family."

Mr. Klitschko warned that his city — and the whole country — face great danger in coming days. Earlier, his office announced a two-day curfew for the capital.

On Tuesday, firefighters in Kyiv battled a fierce blaze in a 16-story apartment block for most of the day after a missile gouged a big crater at its entrance. They rescued residents through apartment windows by ladder through the thick smoke and later went back for some of the pets had been left behind. By midafternoon they had carried out two bodies in black body bags.

Some of the survivors sat on benches, reluctant to leave even as the authorities offered to take them to a refuge.

"There was a huge roar and all the windows shattered," Yelena Derevyanko said. She and her husband, Vadym, lived on the 16th floor and were rescued by firefighters.

One of their neighbors, Mykola Fedkiv, a retired geologist, stood waiting all day hoping to get back into his apartment to collect his personal documents. "I came out with nothing," he said. "I left everything: My telephone, my medicines, everything."

The explosions had jolted him awake, and he fled his apartment on the 12th floor down the main stairs. A fire was already burning on the first floor and he climbed through the blasted entrance hall and into the bomb crater where people grabbed his arms and pulled him out.

Clutching a plastic bag of groceries someone had given him, he waved off a question as to where he would stay the night.

"God knows," he said.

that the three traveling prime ministers had arrived "on behalf of" the European Union Council. However, E.U. officials said the men had not received the European Union's blessing for their trip.

The visit by the three leaders created some unusual friction within the European Union, whose 27 member states have projected a united front against Moscow, taking extraordinary measures to punish it for the attack on Ukraine with record speed.

Prime Minister Morawiecki of Poland brought up his intention to visit Kyiv at an E.U. meeting last week at Versailles, outside Paris. But the visit to Kyiv never got a formal blessing from the bloc.

Still, the visit to Kyiv, which some E.U. officials worried might lead to promises that could not be kept, was welcomed as brave in parts of the bloc.

“This is Europe at its best,” declared a headline in the popular German [tabloid Bild](#), on an article that said: “Putin’s war is not over as long as Europe is ready to defend its values. With all the means it takes to do so. Even if it’s just a train ride in the shadow of bombs and missiles.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Hong Kong hot spot; omicron rise Europe</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/briefing/covid-hong-kong-omicron-surge.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/briefing/covid-hong-kong-omicron-surge.html</a>
GIST	<p>Even as Covid-19 cases and deaths <a href="#">have continued to decline</a> in the United States, there are some worrisome developments around the world. Today, I’ll walk through them — and explain their implications for the U.S.</p> <p><b>The Pacific region ...</b></p> <p>After more than two years of mostly fighting off Covid, Hong Kong has become the world’s worst hot spot. The main problem, as in so many other places, is vaccine skepticism.</p> <p>Heading into the current outbreak, nearly 40 percent of Hong Kong’s population was not vaccinated, and more than half of people over 70 — the age group most vulnerable to severe Covid — were unvaccinated.</p> <p>Why? Many Hong Kong residents do not trust the government, given the increasing repression by China. Others are dubious of Western medicine or have been influenced by misinformation, as my colleagues Alexandra Stevenson and Austin Ramzy <a href="#">have reported</a>. “I worry that the side effects of vaccination will kill me,” Lam Suk-haa, who’s 80 years old, told The Times last month. “I won’t get vaccinated as long as I have a choice.”</p> <p>Until recently, Hong Kong — like mainland China — had been largely successful in keeping out the virus, which meant that vaccine skepticism did not bring large costs. But the Omicron variant is so contagious that it overwhelmed Hong Kong’s <a href="#">“zero-Covid” strategy</a>.</p> <p>Adding to the problem, many residents have received Sinovac, a Chinese-made vaccine that is less effective than the vaccines designed in the U.S. and Europe — by Moderna, Pfizer, Johnson &amp; Johnson and AstraZeneca. Although the Pfizer vaccine is available in Hong Kong, many residents wrongly fear that it has dangerous side effects. Sinovac still provides meaningful protection against severe illness, but not as much as the Western vaccines.</p> <p>The death rate in Hong Kong has soared this month, surpassing 25 per 100,000 residents in the past week. That’s not as high as New York’s peak death rate in the spring of 2020, but it is higher than in any country today. And Hong Kong’s rate will probably continue rising, because new case numbers did not start falling until about a week ago; death trends typically lag case trends by about three weeks.</p> <p>“I’m not sure people appreciate quite how bad the Covid situation is in Hong Kong, nor what might be around the corner,” John Burn-Murdoch of The Financial Times wrote yesterday. “What’s driving this? Vaccines. Or more specifically: the elderly vaccination rate.”</p> <p>Many elderly residents of mainland China are also unvaccinated, and it too could be on the verge of an increase in Covid deaths. Yesterday, outbreaks led to the closures of many theaters and restaurants in Shanghai, while several large factories — including a major maker of iPhones — <a href="#">suspended production</a>. The shutdowns could ripple across the global economy, exacerbating goods shortages and inflation.</p>

Covid is also spreading rapidly in New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and several other Pacific countries that had previously kept caseloads low. The death rates in those countries are far lower than in Hong Kong, because of higher vaccination rates. (You can look up [any country's data](#).)

### ... and Europe

Europe has often been a few weeks ahead of the U.S. with Covid trends — and cases are now rising in Britain, Germany, Italy and some other parts of Europe. The main cause appears to be an even more contagious version of Omicron, known as BA.2.

BA.2 has already begun to spread in the U.S., as well. It accounted for about 12 percent of newly diagnosed cases last week, according to the C.D.C. The variant may also be the reason that the amount of Covid virus detected in wastewater is rising in [about one-third](#) of American cities that track such data. Wastewater samples tend to be a leading indicator of case counts.

If that pattern repeats, BA.2 would be about to end two months of falling case counts in the U.S. Since mid-January, the number of new daily Covid cases has dropped more than 95 percent and is now at its lowest level since last summer, before the Delta surge.

The magnitude of any BA.2 increase may be limited by the fact that about 45 percent of Americans have already contracted Omicron. “That should be highly protective,” Andy Slavitt, a former Biden administration adviser, wrote yesterday. On the other hand, a 45 percent infection rate means that most Americans did not contract Omicron, leaving many of them susceptible to BA.2.

Even if cases rise, as seems likely, there are good reasons not to panic. Vaccination tends to turn Covid into [a mild illness](#), especially for people who have received a booster. For the unvaccinated and unboosted, BA.2 is another reason to get a shot.

It’s also a reason for the federal government and states to expand access to both Evusheld — a drug that can help protect the immunocompromised — and Paxlovid — a post-infection treatment. Finding either is [often difficult](#) today. (If you’re looking for one of them, click on [this link for Evusheld](#) and [this one for Paxlovid](#).)

**The bottom line:** Covid isn’t going away, but vaccination and other treatments can keep future increases manageable. The biggest problem remains the millions of people who remain unvaccinated, many of them by choice. That’s the case [in the U.S.](#), in Hong Kong and across much of [Europe](#), [Africa](#) and the rest of the world.

Inducing more people to get shots — through [persuasion](#) or [mandates](#) — would probably save more lives than any other Covid policy.

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HEADLINE	03/15 New Zealand accelerates reopening
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/15/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?name=style-coronavirus&amp;region=hub&amp;block=storyline_live_updates_block_recirc&amp;action=click&amp;pgtype=LegacyCollection#new-zealand-border-reopening">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/15/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?name=style-coronavirus&amp;region=hub&amp;block=storyline_live_updates_block_recirc&amp;action=click&amp;pgtype=LegacyCollection#new-zealand-border-reopening</a>
GIST	<p>New Zealand, whose border closures were among the strictest in the world, plans to welcome back foreign tourists months ahead of schedule in a bid to bolster the country’s economic recovery, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced on Wednesday.</p> <p>Vaccinated Australians will be allowed to enter from just before midnight on April 12. Vaccinated travelers with valid visas and those from visa-waiver countries such as Canada and the United States can enter from May 1.</p> <p>“We are sending a very clear message that we are accelerating our economic recovery,” Ms. Ardern said at a news conference on Wednesday. She added, “In short, we’re ready to welcome the world back.”</p>



	<p>The announcement comes as cases remain near peak levels in <a href="#">New Zealand</a>, which, like other countries, is facing economic uncertainty and rapidly rising inflation. The government on Tuesday <a href="#">announced cuts to the cost of fuel</a> among other measures to tackle a “cost of living crisis.”</p> <p>Incoming travelers will not be required to quarantine on arrival, but must take a supervised rapid coronavirus test before entering and two additional tests in the first week of their stay. These tests are intended to prevent the spread of new variants, Ms. Ardern said.</p> <p>The government had intended to allow tourists back starting in July, with a full reopening planned for October. But after an outbreak of the Omicron variant sent cases in the country surging to more than 20,000 per day, tourism operators and businesses pushed to bring forward that timeline. They argued that <a href="#">borders should remain closed</a> to try to keep the variant out because of its prevalence around the globe.</p> <p>New Zealand closed its borders early in the pandemic, allowing only a trickle of citizens to return, and later essential workers, and mandating a two-week hotel quarantine on arrival. The border closures allowed New Zealand to maintain a “zero-Covid” policy for most of the pandemic, with total deaths and hospitalizations among the lowest in the world.</p> <p>But the policy also crippled its international tourism sector, which previously catered to millions of foreign visitors each year. Some companies say <a href="#">revenues have plunged by 95 percent</a> since the pandemic began, while others have had to target the less lucrative domestic market.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 White House public tours to return April 15</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/15/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?name=stylin-coronavirus&amp;region=hub&amp;block=storyline%20live%20updates%20block%20recirc&amp;action=click&amp;pgtype=LegacyCollection#white-house-public-tours-are-set-to-return-in-april">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/15/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?name=stylin-coronavirus&amp;region=hub&amp;block=storyline live updates block recirc&amp;action=click&amp;pgtype=LegacyCollection#white-house-public-tours-are-set-to-return-in-april</a>
GIST	<p>The White House is set to open for public tours on April 15, more than two years after they were suspended because of the pandemic.</p> <p>The free tours will operate on Fridays and Saturdays only, the White House said in a <a href="#">statement</a> on Tuesday.</p> <p>The White House “reserves the right to adjust availability of the public tours as necessary to adhere to the latest health guidance,” the statement said.</p> <p>The White House did not say why it was resuming tours, which were <a href="#">suspended in March 2020</a>, although caseloads in Washington, D.C., have reached lows not recorded since last summer, according to <a href="#">a New York Times database</a>.</p> <p>Masks will be optional on the tours, and the White House statement makes no mention of vaccines. Guests cannot attend if they have experienced Covid symptoms, come into contact with someone with a confirmed or suspected case, or tested positive for the virus in the previous 10 days.</p> <p><a href="#">As was the case before the pandemic</a>, people must request a public tour through a Congress member’s office between 21 to 90 days in advance. In past years, White House <a href="#">tours went through parts of the East Wing and the Residence</a>, with Secret Service agents stationed in every room, available to answer historical questions.</p> <p>Information about the annual spring garden tour and the Easter Egg Roll, <a href="#">which has been canceled twice because of the pandemic</a>, will be available in the coming days, the White House said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Second booster shot adults 65 and older?</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/us/politics/pfizer-second-booster-shot-older-americans.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/us/politics/pfizer-second-booster-shot-older-americans.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Pfizer and BioNTech said on Tuesday that they had sought emergency authorization for a second booster shot of their coronavirus vaccine for adults 65 and older.</p> <p>The companies’ request to the Food and Drug Administration was based heavily on data from Israel, where such shots are authorized <a href="#">for a somewhat broader group</a>. Their move could further inflame <a href="#">a tortuous debate among scientists</a> over when and how the vaccines’ protection should be bolstered, and for whom.</p> <p>Pfizer’s chief executive, Dr. Albert Bourla, said repeatedly over the past week that he believed an additional dose would be necessary to counteract waning protection after the third dose, now authorized for all Americans 12 and older.</p> <p>“The protection that you are getting from the third, it is good enough, actually quite good for hospitalizations and deaths,” <a href="#">he told CBS’s “Face the Nation” on Sunday</a>. “It’s not that good against infections.”</p> <p>Previous requests last fall for a booster shot set off a fierce public debate. Some public health experts vigorously opposed a third dose for the general population only to change their minds after the Omicron variant proved more agile at evading the vaccines’ shield.</p> <p>But scientists have continued to clash over how long the vaccines’ protection lasts and how much benefit added shots offer. A fourth dose could prove even more contentious than a third.</p> <p>In <a href="#">an interview with Business Insider</a> on Monday, Dr. Stephen Hoge, the president of Moderna, whose vaccine is the second most widely used in the United States, sounded a more cautious note than Dr. Bourla.</p> <p>“For those who are immune-compromised, those who are older adults, over the age of 50 or at least 65, we want to strongly recommend and encourage” a fourth shot, he said - without saying when it should be given. Like a number of other experts, he suggested that most people would need an annual coronavirus shot, just like the flu shot.</p> <p>In their justification, Pfizer and BioNTech cited two recent studies from Israel, both published on preprint servers without peer review. <a href="#">One study</a>, done in conjunction with Israel’s Ministry of Health, reviewed the health records of 1.1 million people and concluded that those who got a fourth dose of Pfizer’s vaccine were less likely to become infected with the virus or to develop severe illness than those who had received just three doses.</p> <p>But since Israel only recently began its second booster program, researchers could not determine whether the added protection was short-lived. Israel began offering fourth doses to health care workers in late December, then quickly broadened eligibility to those 60 and older and other vulnerable groups.</p> <p><a href="#">The second study</a>, of Israeli health care workers, showed that even though fourth shots of either Pfizer’s or Moderna’s vaccine boosted antibody levels, they were not very effective at preventing infections. Researchers said those findings underscored the urgency of developing vaccines that target whatever variant is circulating.</p> <p>The National Institutes of Health in the United States and various vaccine manufacturers have been studying how the vaccines could be updated. One federal health official said results were not expected until the summer.</p> <p>Some senior administration officials say that depending on the evidence, a second booster could make sense now for older Americans, but not for the general population. The F.D.A. is expected to convene a meeting of its expert advisory committee next month to discuss the issue of fourth shots. Developments on Pfizer’s request were <a href="#">reported earlier by The Washington Post</a>.</p>

Asked last month whether everyone would need another injection, [Dr. Peter Marks, the F.D.A.'s top vaccine regulator, said](#), "Barring any surprises from new variants, maybe the best thing is to think about our booster strategy in conjunction with the influenza vaccine next fall, and get as many people as possible boosted then." Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the chief medical adviser to the White House, has suggested that any move toward a second booster now would most likely be aimed at those most at risk, possibly based on age and underlying conditions.

To date, about two-thirds of Americans 5 and older have been fully vaccinated with two shots of a vaccine. Only about half of those eligible for boosters have received them, but the proportion rises to two-thirds for those 65 and older, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In a call with reporters on Tuesday, senior administration officials said the administration was running short on funds for new doses. The administration has enough supply to manage a fourth shot for people 65 and older, one said, but could not expand that effort to everyone without more funding from Congress.

The C.D.C. has recommended that [many Americans with immune deficiencies get three shots as part of their initial series](#), followed by a fourth shot as a booster. But a huge question mark hangs over everyone else.

[A study](#) released by the agency last month showed waning protection after a booster shot of either Moderna's or Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine. While researchers did not break down cases by age, underlying conditions or the presence of immune deficiencies, they said the findings illustrated the possible importance of a fourth shot.

The study analyzed hospitalizations and visits to emergency rooms and urgent care clinics in 10 states by people who received booster shots of either Moderna's or Pfizer-BioNTech's vaccine. It showed the level of protection against hospitalization fell from 91 percent in the two months after a third shot to 78 percent after four to five months. Effectiveness against visits to emergency rooms or urgent care clinics declined from 87 percent to 66 percent.

Kaiser Permanente Southern California also suggested that the effectiveness of a booster dose against both symptomatic and severe disease wanes in three to six months, while a fourth dose restores antibody levels to the peak level triggered by a third dose, according to Pfizer and BioNTech.

But [other recent studies have suggested](#) that three doses of a Covid vaccine — or even just two — are enough to protect most people from serious illness and death for a long period of time. While antibody levels fall off, other parts of the immune system can remember and destroy the virus over many months if not years, according to at least four studies published in top-tier journals.

"We're starting to see now diminishing returns on the number of additional doses," E. John Wherry, the director of the Institute for Immunology at the University of Pennsylvania, said in an interview last month.

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HEADLINE	03/15 China leader tested by Russia war Ukraine
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/chinese-leader-tested-russian-invasion-ukraine/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/chinese-leader-tested-russian-invasion-ukraine/</a>
GIST	<p>Chinese President Xi Jinping is being tested by the Russian invasion of Ukraine as the Communist Party chief seeks to support Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime in the face of crippling Western sanctions and the prospect that those sanctions will hit China for any stepped-up support of the Kremlin in the intensifying regional war.</p> <p>China's main concern is not with the unfolding humanitarian disaster produced by the conflict, but with its own interests, analysts say.</p>

CIA Director William Burns said last week that the Chinese Communist Party leader has invested heavily in a partnership with Russia.

“I don’t expect that to change anytime soon,” he told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. “I do, however, believe that the Chinese leadership, President Xi in particular, is unsettled by what he’s seen, partly, because his own intelligence doesn’t appear to have told him what was going to happen.”

Russian and Chinese expectations of a rapid advance and takeover of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, followed by the installation of a puppet Russian government, have yet to be realized. Nearly three weeks into the fighting, none of Ukraine’s major cities is fully in Russian control.

The CIA director made the comments prior to recent U.S. reports that Moscow had asked China to provide military equipment and economic support in the aftermath of the invasion and the imposition of harsh Western sanctions that threaten to cripple large swaths of Russia’s industrial and financial base.

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan met for seven hours Monday in Rome with Yang Jiechi, a senior Chinese Communist Party official. During part of that previously scheduled meeting, Mr. Sullivan conveyed the Biden administration’s concerns about possible Chinese military and economic support for Russia in its Ukraine war.

On Sunday, Mr. Sullivan said in a television interview that there appeared to have been some coordination between China and Russia on the invasion planning.

“We also are watching closely to see the extent to which China actually does provide any form of support, material support or economic support, to Russia,” Mr. Sullivan said on CNN. “It is a concern of ours.”

The national security adviser said Beijing has been notified “that we will not stand by and allow any country to compensate Russia for its losses from the economic sanctions.”

He declined to comment when asked whether China is facing U.S. sanctions if the Chinese help Moscow circumvent U.S. and European sanctions.

A senior Biden administration official who briefed reporters on the lengthy Sullivan-Yang meeting in Rome also declined to discuss Russian requests for Chinese support.

“But what I would just say, in general, is that we do have deep concerns about China’s alignment with Russia at this time, and the national security adviser was direct about those concerns and the potential implications and consequences of certain actions,” the senior official said.

Chinese state media said only in passing that the Ukraine conflict had been discussed in reporting on the meeting between Mr. Sullivan and Mr. Yang, focusing more coverage on Chinese complaints about U.S. overtures toward Taiwan.

However, the Communist Party-affiliated People’s Daily quoted Mr. Yang as telling Mr. Sullivan that President Biden, in a bid to ease bilateral strains, had promised Mr. Xi that the United States was not seeking a new cold war and would not seek to change China’s communist system.

‘Reputational damage’

Mr. Burns, the CIA director, said China fears “reputational damage” from its alignment with Moscow and tacit backing for the Russian military aggression, which has included attacks on civilians.

Mr. Xi fears China’s economy, while large, will take a hit as a result of the Western sanctions on Russia, compounding Beijing’s lower than expected economic growth rates this year, Mr. Burns said.

Another setback for the Chinese leader is the renewed closeness between the United States and Europe that have joined forces economically to punish Russia. China's two-way trade with the European Union, which has opposed Russia's war in Ukraine, is far larger than Chinese bilateral trade with Moscow.

Beijing has been attempting to divide Europe from the Americans in a bid to expand its influence on the continent.

Mr. Xi also is troubled that Mr. Putin "has driven Americans and Europeans more closely together and strengthened the trans-Atlantic alliance in ways that would have been a little bit hard to imagine before the invasion began," Mr. Burns said.

China has been seeking an independent relationship with European states and has been looking for ways to drive wedges between the United States and its NATO allies.

"What President Putin has so successfully done is to make that much less likely," Mr. Burns said.

Chinese Communist Party leaders are set to hold a major conclave in November and want to have stability and predictability in the global economy.

The Russian invasion has upset global markets that have affected China.

"That's raised some question marks in the minds of the Chinese leadership as they look at what is going to be an enduring partnership, but maybe with a few more concerns than they had 16 days ago," Mr. Burns said.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/16 Refugee crisis to test Europe economy</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/business/economy/ukraine-russia-refugee-crisis.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/business/economy/ukraine-russia-refugee-crisis.html</a>
GIST	<p>Nearly everyone who crossed the Danube on the open-air ferry from Ukraine and landed in the frostbitten Romanian port city of Isaccea on a recent morning had a roller bag and a stopgap plan. One woman planned to join her husband in Istanbul. Another was headed to Munich, where her company has its headquarters. Others were meeting brothers, cousins, in-laws and friends in Paris or Sofia, Madrid or Amsterdam.</p> <p>And then, they hoped to go back to Ukraine.</p> <p>"I need to return," said Lisa Slavachevskaya, who traveled with her 10-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter from Odessa. "My husband, my mother and my grandmother are there." She said she planned to go home in a month.</p> <p>Whether such quick turnabouts are possible is one of the many uncertainties hanging over Europe's fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II. No matter how the catastrophe in Ukraine ends, the costs of helping the millions of Ukrainians fleeing Russian bombs will be staggering. Some early estimates put the bill for housing, transporting, feeding and processing the flood of humanity at <a href="#">\$30 billion in the first year</a> alone.</p> <p>"This is a humanitarian and medical emergency in the next weeks," said Giovanni Peri, director of the Global Migration Center at the University of California, Davis.</p> <p>What happens over the next few months will determine if Europe will face the additional costs of a massive resettlement that has the potential to reshape the economic landscape.</p> <p>European economies are still recovering from the pandemic and coping with stubborn supply chain shortages and high inflation. As costly as it will be to provide short-term relief to families temporarily displaced by the war, over the long term the expense of integrating millions of people would be much</p>

greater and put immense strain on housing, education and health care systems. While a giant influx of workers, particularly skilled ones, is likely to increase a nation's output over time, it could intensify competition in the job market. Roughly 13 million people were unemployed in the European Union in January.

"It is uncertainty that now dominates the economic calculation," Mr. Peri said.

More than three million refugees fled Ukraine in less than three weeks, according to the U.N. International Organization for Migration, and millions more are likely to follow as the war rages on.

Officials, migration experts and economists say it is too early to say whether most displaced Ukrainians will end up staying.

That is a stark contrast to 2015, when 1.3 million migrants from the Middle East and North Africa escaped to Europe after years of war and terror, seeking asylum because they feared persecution. Return was not an option.

So far, officials say, relatively few have asked for such protection. Of the 431,000 Ukrainians who have crossed into Romania, for example, only 3,800 have asked for asylum. Indeed, many winced at the "refugee" label.

"I don't consider myself a refugee," Evgeniy Serheev, a lawyer, said through a translator as he waited to cross into the northeastern Romanian town of Siret. But with his wife, three children and their bags crammed into one of hundreds of cars inching toward the border, he acknowledged that he looked the part.

The urgent humanitarian and moral case is compelling on its face; the economic argument can be harder to make. Most research, though, over the long term shows that working refugees can help economies grow, expanding a nation's productive capacity, paying taxes and generating more business for grocery stores, hair salons, and clothing and electronics stores. That was what happened in Germany after 2015 when it took in more than a million refugees, most of them from Syria.

"Economically speaking it was a net positive," said Ángel Talavera, head of European economics at Oxford Economics.

But countries face significant initial costs.

The European Union last week pledged 500 million euros, or \$550 million, in humanitarian support, but it will have to put up more. "European governments are going to blow the budget," said Claus Vistlesen, chief eurozone economist for Pantheon Macroeconomics. This latest drain comes on top of an extraordinary amount of public spending over the last two years to battle the coronavirus pandemic.

The sudden need for more housing, fuel, food, health care services and more is going to further exacerbate supply shortages. "Inflation is going to go up, up, up," Mr. Vistlesen said.

In the eurozone, inflation is running at 5.8 percent, and Mr. Vistlesen said he expected it to rise to 7 percent this year given soaring energy prices. Those are up by nearly a third since last year. For the European Central Bank, he added, it will make the delicate task of balancing the risk of inflation with the risk of recession all the more difficult.

For those living and working in Europe, it will mean less spending power in the short run. If wages don't rise, they will be poorer.

For now, Ukrainians, with strong kinship, cultural and religious ties in other European countries, have mostly been met with care packages and offers of free shelter, transportation and food.



At the border in Siret, volunteers rushed up to Ukrainian families trudging up the road with offers of cups of hot tea and €5 cellphone SIM cards. Organizations, businesses and individuals jockeyed for a spot closest to the checkpoint to be the first to give chicken soup, kebabs, blankets, toothbrushes, stuffed animals and hats.

The government in Bucharest has so far allocated \$49 million to cover the costs. The prime minister, Nicolae Ciuca, said he expected the European Union to reimburse a big chunk of that.

The E.U. has granted Ukrainians immediate permission to stay for up to three years, get a job and go to school — access that [migrants from other parts of the globe could only dream of](#). And some countries, including Romania and Poland, have agreed to allow refugees to receive the same social and health services available to their own citizens.

Yet past experience with refugee crises shows that such good will often sours as an influx stretches government finances and social services like education and health care.

There has been an outpouring of sympathy and contributions, but the burden of actually hosting the refugees is lopsided in the extreme. Poland alone has had roughly 1.7 million Ukrainians stream in, and Warsaw's population has swelled by 15 percent.

"We're getting overwhelmed," Rafal Trzaskowski, the city's mayor, said in a news interview. "We can't improvise anymore."

Clemence Landers, a policy fellow at the Center for Global Development, said a handful of nations were taking on what should be an international responsibility and needed financial help to do so.

Global institutions like the World Bank are an important source of cheap loans, particularly for the poorest European countries, which are hosting the most Ukrainians, argued Ms. Landers, a co-author of an analysis of the refugee crisis' costs.

International financial support can help tamp down the political and social backlash that often follows refugee crisis, she added.

If many of the Ukrainian refugees end up staying longer than they expect, there are reasons to believe that they can be integrated into the economy relatively quickly. Many have a network of friends and family. Their level of education is not that different from some of the host countries. (In Ukraine, the average number of years of school was 11.3 in 2017, according to the United Nations.) And they have a record of employment.

Mr. Peri, at the University of California, said Ukrainian immigrants already in Europe were working in hotels and restaurants and as home assistants for seniors and disabled people, jobs that have been hard to fill in some places.

Despite the widening devastation inflicted by the Russians on Ukraine, few of the people interviewed at the border were ready to start contemplating a long future far from home.

Iryna Karpenko, who was crossing into Siret with her three children, two sisters-in-law and her father-in-law in a blue Toyota van, said they were headed to Bulgaria. They had budgeted roughly €1,500 (\$1,644) per person for a one month stay. In Ukraine, she said, "we have houses, husbands and jobs there."

Asked what they planned to do once they crossed the border, Ms. Karpenko was about to respond when her sister-in-law Karina Bohatynska piped up from the back seat: "Go back home."

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HEADLINE	03/16 Ukraine leader thanks 3; extraordinary visit
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/europe/zelensky-european-leaders-kyiv.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/europe/zelensky-european-leaders-kyiv.html</a>

GIST	<p>President Volodymyr Zelensky thanked the leaders of three NATO-member countries who traveled into the war-torn capital of Ukraine for an extraordinary meeting on Tuesday and urged others to do the same.</p> <p>The leaders from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia who traveled to Kyiv “fear nothing,” Mr. Zelensky <a href="#">said</a> after the meeting, adding, “I am sure that with such friends, with such countries, with such neighbors and partners, we will really be able to win.”</p> <p>The leaders discussed not only increasing sanctions against Russia for the invasion of Ukraine, which began on Feb. 24, but also “plans to rebuild our country after the end of hostilities,” Mr. Zelensky’s office said, projecting an air of confidence despite a brutal campaign that has already driven more than <a href="#">two million Ukrainians</a> to seek refuge in neighboring countries.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky has sought to rally international support through nightly videos that he posts on social media, as well as virtual meetings with world leaders — including a speech to U.S. lawmakers on Wednesday.</p> <p>But Tuesday’s meeting in Kyiv, which Russian forces have targeted but so far failed to conquer, was a rare, in-person gathering for Mr. Zelensky and outside leaders. <a href="#">At least one attendee</a> wore a green protective vest while sitting at the table with Mr. Zelensky, according to a photograph posted on the <a href="#">president’s official website</a>.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky also invited other world leaders to join him in Kyiv, and once again pressed allies to enforce a no-fly zone over the country, which they have resisted out of concerns of being drawn into a direct conflict with Russia.</p> <p>“I invite all friends of Ukraine to visit Kyiv,” Mr. Zelensky said in a statement posted on his official Telegram channel. “It can be dangerous here. Because our sky is not yet closed to Russian missiles and planes.”</p> <p>He added: “You know for sure that the eyes of all the people of the world are now focused on our capital, on Ukrainians.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Russia debt payments due; pay in rubles?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/business/russia-debt-bonds-default.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/business/russia-debt-bonds-default.html</a>
GIST	<p>Russia is teetering on the edge of a possible sovereign debt default, and the first sign could come as soon as Wednesday.</p> <p>The Russian government owes about \$40 billion in debt denominated in U.S. dollars and euros, and half of those bonds are owned by foreign investors. And Russian corporations have racked up approximately \$100 billion in foreign currency debt, JPMorgan estimates.</p> <p>On Wednesday, \$117 million in interest payments on dollar-denominated government debt are due.</p> <p>But Russia is increasingly <a href="#">isolated from global financial markets</a>, and investors are losing hope that they will see their money. As the government strives to protect what’s left of its <a href="#">access to foreign currency</a>, it has suggested it would pay its dollar- or euro-denominated debt obligations in rubles instead. That has prompted credit rating agencies to warn of an imminent default.</p> <p>The Russian currency has lost nearly 40 percent of its value against the U.S. dollar in the past month. Even if the payments were made, economic sanctions would make it difficult for Western lenders to access the rubles if they are in Russian bank accounts.</p> <p>“It is not that Russia doesn’t have money,” Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, told reporters last week. The problem is, Russia can’t use a lot of its international</p>

currency reserves, she said, because they have been frozen by sanctions. “I’m not going to speculate what may or may not happen, but just to say that no more we talk about Russian default as an improbable event.”

Last week, the chief economist of the World Bank said Russia and Belarus were [squarely in “default territory,”](#) and Fitch Ratings said a default was imminent because sanctions had diminished Russia’s willingness to repay its foreign debts.

Russia last defaulted on its debt in 1998, when a currency crisis led it to default on ruble-denominated debt and temporarily ban foreign debt payments. The crisis shocked the financial world, leading to the collapse of the U.S. hedge fund [Long-Term Capital Management](#), which required Federal Reserve intervention and a multibillion-dollar bailout. If Russia failed to make payments on its foreign currency debt, it would be its first such default since the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Foreign investor interest in Russian assets fell in 2014 when sanctions were imposed after the country annexed Crimea, and never fully recovered before more sanctions were imposed by Washington in 2019. But holdings aren’t negligible. Russian government bonds were considered investment grade as recently as a few weeks ago, and were included in indexes used to benchmark other funds. JPMorgan estimates that international investors own 22 percent of Russian companies’ foreign currency debt.

Funds managed by BlackRock, the world’s largest asset manager, have incurred \$17 billion in losses on Russian assets, including equities, in recent weeks, according to the firm. The loss in value has a number of causes, including investors selling their holdings.

But so far, regulators have said the risk to global banking systems from a Russian default wouldn’t be systemic because of the limited direct exposure to Russian assets. The larger ramifications from the war in Ukraine and Russia’s economic isolation are from higher energy and food prices.

Still, financial companies have been scrambling to assess their exposure, according to Daniel Tannebaum, a partner at Oliver Wyman who advises banks on sanctions.

“I’m seeing a lot of clients that had exposure to the Russian market wondering what type of default scenarios might be coming up,” said Mr. Tannebaum, who is also a former Treasury Department official. In the case of a default, “those bonds become worthless, for lack of a better term,” he said.

On Monday, Russia’s finance minister, Anton Siluanov, accused the countries that have frozen the country’s internationally held currency reserves of trying to create an “artificial default.” The government has the money to meet its debt obligations, he said, but sanctions were hampering its ability to pay. Mr. Siluanov had also said over the weekend that the country had lost access to about \$300 billion of its \$640 billion currency reserves.

The government insists investors will be paid. The finance ministry said on Monday it would send instructions to banks to issue the payment due on dollar- or euro-denominated bonds in dollars or euros, but if the banks don’t execute the order then it will be recalled and payment will be made in rubles instead. The statement also said that the payments could be made in rubles and then converted to another currency only when the country’s gold and foreign exchange reserves are unfrozen.

“In any case, obligations to our investors will be met. And the ability to receive the funds in foreign currency will depend on the imposed restrictions,” Mr. Siluanov said.

But the statement doesn’t provide a clear vision of what might happen on Wednesday. American sanctions allow for the receipt of payments of debt obligations until late May, and so the reasoning behind the Russian finance ministry’s claim that banks might refuse the payments is unclear. The payments due on Wednesday also have a 30-day grace period, so a default wouldn’t technically happen until mid-April. But Russia has already blocked interest payments on ruble-denominated bonds to nonresidents, a sign of its hesitancy to transfer funds abroad.

While the Russian finance ministry said it could meet its obligations by paying in rubles, others disagreed.

“In order to avoid a default, the only way that Russia can really navigate this is to send the full payment in dollars,” said Trang Nguyen, an emerging markets strategist at JPMorgan.

Some Russian bonds issued in recent years do have provisions that allow for repayment in other currencies, including the ruble, if Russia can’t make payments in dollars for reasons “beyond its control.”

For investors, payment in rubles would be little more than a positive talking point for Russia, according to Jay Newman, who helped lead the [15-year legal battle against Argentina](#) over defaulted debt at the hedge fund Elliott Management.

“It just gives them a little more opportunity to claim that ‘we did what we could, but we are prevented by our enemies from actually keeping our clients’ bonds,’” Mr. Newman said.

Investors have already taken the financial hit, he added. Russian bonds are trading at an average of about 20 cents on the dollar as traders have priced in a default. There has also been forced selling of bonds after the assets were kicked out of indexes, pushing the prices down further.

Some of the institutional investors with larger holdings include BlackRock, PIMCO, Capital Group and Vanguard, according to data compiled from Bloomberg. Vanguard, a large provider of mutual and exchange-traded funds, recently said it had suspended purchases of Russian securities in its actively managed funds and was working on exiting the positions in its index funds. PIMCO, the large asset manager that specializes in bonds, and had built up a sizable exposure to Russian debt, declined to comment on its holdings. Carmignac, a French asset manager, said last week that it was divesting from its Russian holdings.

Officials have been trying to assess the impact the war and the sanctions leveled at Russia could have on the global financial system. In late February, members of the Financial Stability Oversight Council, part of the Treasury Department, received a briefing on international market developments related to Ukraine and noted that the U.S. financial system continued to function in an orderly manner.

Andrea Enria, the chair of the European Central Bank’s supervisory board, said on Tuesday that the direct exposure of banks in the eurozone to Russian assets appeared contained and manageable. For example, Russian and Ukrainian debt securities made up about half a percent of eurozone investment fund debt holdings.

“So far we have seen nothing particularly disruptive,” even in indirect exposure to Russia, he added. Still, there are risks stemming from a Russian debt default and broader financial market volatility, especially in markets linked to oil, gas and other commodities, he said.

“In the aggregate, Russia is not systemically risky, however there are people that hold big chunks of Russian debt and they have to figure out what to do,” said Paul Cadario, a former World Bank official who in the 1990s oversaw the bank’s budget for Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

“There’s going to be some player that nobody has noticed that all of a sudden is in distress, then you have to hope that it’s not systemically significant or dangerous to the broader financial sector,” said Mr. Cadario, who is a fellow at the University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy.

And it is unclear what will happen to investors who have bought credit default swaps on Russian sovereign debt — a kind of insurance that it designed to pay out in the event of a default — if Russia attempts to repay foreign bondholders in rubles.

	<p>If Russia does default on its sovereign debt or repay in rubles, bondholders could struggle to get repayment through the courts because for debt issued in dollars and euros in recent years, Russia didn't waive its sovereign immunity, limiting the ability of bondholders to sue in the event of a default.</p> <p>"It's not to say that creditors won't be able to take Russia to court and get a judgment — but it's going to be a long, hard slog, and nobody knows what the rules are," Mr. Newman said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Russia TV worker protested on live show</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/europe/marina-ovsyannikova-ukraine-war-protester.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/europe/marina-ovsyannikova-ukraine-war-protester.html</a>
GIST	<p>A Russian state television employee who stormed a live broadcast on Monday was interrogated by the police for 14 hours and fined by a Moscow court on Tuesday.</p> <p>"I spent two days without sleep," the woman, Marina Ovsyannikova, said in a <a href="#">video recorded outside of the courtroom</a> on Tuesday by Mediazona, an online news site.</p> <p>"I wasn't allowed to contact my relatives or people close to me," Ms. Ovsyannikova said, adding that she was not allowed "access to any legal representation, so I was in a fairly difficult position."</p> <p>Ms. Ovsyannikova, who worked for Channel 1 in Moscow, was detained on Monday after she burst onscreen during a popular news show, yelling, "Stop the war!" and holding up a sign that read, "They're lying to you here."</p> <p>Immediately after, a Russian human rights group named OVD-Info <a href="#">circulated a prerecorded video</a> in which Ms. Ovsyannikova said she was "deeply ashamed" to have helped make "Kremlin propaganda."</p> <p>The fine issued Tuesday was for that video, not the on-air protest. Ms. Ovsyannikova was charged with organizing an unauthorized public event and fined the equivalent of about \$273, according to Sergey Badamshin, the chairman of a Moscow bar association.</p> <p>The protest may cost her more dearly.</p> <p>Tass, a state publication, reported that Ms. Ovsyannikova was being investigated for violating Russia's new "<a href="#">false information</a>" law, which carries a sentence of up to 15 years in prison for anyone convicted of disseminating news about Russia's invasion of Ukraine that goes against the Kremlin's official narrative. Mr. Badamshin confirmed that the investigation was underway.</p> <p>Dmitri Peskov, the spokesman for President Vladimir V. Putin, said at a news conference Tuesday that what "this woman did is hooliganism."</p> <p>Ms. Ovsyannikova got a much warmer response from Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky. In a televised address Tuesday, he expressed gratitude for "that woman who walked in the studio of Channel One with a poster against the war."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Chicago: no charges 2 high-profile killings</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/us/adam-toledo-shooting-kim-foxx.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/us/adam-toledo-shooting-kim-foxx.html</a>
GIST	<p>Prosecutors in Chicago said on Tuesday that they would not file charges against the officers who fatally shot 13-year-old Adam Toledo and 22-year-old Anthony Alvarez, killings that occurred two days apart in March 2021 and put a spotlight on the Police Department's chase policy.</p> <p>In announcing her decision, Kim Foxx, the state's attorney for Cook County, said the officers, who in each case gave chase to an armed suspect, might have violated the department's chase policy, but that the evidence did not support the filing of criminal charges.</p>

“Under Illinois law, an officer is justified in using force likely to cause death or great bodily harm when he reasonably believes that such force is necessary to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself” or others, Ms. Foxx said at a news conference.

“The case law that we rely on recognizes that police officers are often forced to make split-second decisions and judgments in circumstances that are tense, uncertain and rapidly evolving.”

Though Ms. Foxx’s announcement took criminal charges off the table, lawyers representing the families of the victims have sued the City of Chicago and the officers involved in the shootings. The officers could also face punishment from the department, Ms. Foxx said.

There have been several high-profile convictions of police officers in the past year, including of a former Minneapolis police officer who was [convicted of murdering George Floyd](#) and [three more who were convicted of violating his rights](#).

Still, police officers are rarely charged with crimes for shooting people while on-duty, particularly in cases in which the people were armed, as were Adam and Mr. Alvarez.

Several fatal shootings by the police that led to protests in 2020 did not lead to convictions. Earlier this month, jurors acquitted the only Louisville, Ky., police officer who was charged for his actions during the fatal police raid on Breonna Taylor’s home, [deciding that he was not guilty](#) of endangering her neighbors when he fired into Ms. Taylor’s apartment.

In the early-morning hours of March 29, 2021, Officer Eric E. Stillman of the Chicago police and another officer were responding to reports of gunfire when they saw two people in an alley, including Adam, and started to chase them, officials said.

In a body-cam video, Officer Stillman yells at Adam to stop. “Stop right now!” the officer screams while cursing, telling the 13-year-old to drop his gun. “Hands. Show me your hands. Drop it. Drop it.”

What happened next unfolded “almost simultaneously,” in an estimated 838 milliseconds — less than a second — Ms. Foxx said. Adam turned his body toward Mr. Stillman with his left hand raised and discarded the gun he held in his right hand while the officer fired one shot, striking Adam in the chest.

Officer Stillman can be seen administering C.P.R. on Adam and telling him to “stay with me” as blood poured out of his mouth.

Two days later, two officers activated their car’s emergency lights when they saw Anthony Alvarez, a man they knew from previous encounters, Ms. Foxx said. The night before, she added, he fled as the officers tried to make a traffic stop.

Mr. Alvarez dropped the food and drink in his hands and began running, prompting Officer Evan Solano and his partner to chase him on foot down an alley and into a residential neighborhood, officials said. Mr. Alvarez had a gun in his right hand, Ms. Foxx said.

As Mr. Alvarez turned a corner, he slipped and fell to the ground twice, Ms. Foxx said, adding that as he tried to get up, Officer Solano arrived at the corner and believed — because he did not see him fall — that Mr. Alvarez was in a crouching position with a handgun waiting to ambush him. The officer drew his gun.

While Mr. Alvarez was running with the gun in his right hand, Officer Solano “fired five consecutive shots at Mr. Alvarez while veering to the left, away from Mr. Alvarez,” Ms. Foxx said, adding that the bullets struck him twice in the back and once in the left thigh.

Wounded and sprawled on the ground in front of a house, Mr. Alvarez moaned in pain and said, “Why are you shooting me?”



“You had a gun,” Officer Solano replied.

As in the Adam Toledo case, there was not enough evidence to support criminal charges, Ms. Foxx said, but the officer who shot Mr. Alvarez “created the conditions” under which the use of deadly force became necessary.

“It was unnecessary for the officers to stop and engage with Mr. Alvarez, who was walking through a gas station parking lot holding food and drink,” Ms. Foxx said. “He was not committing any crimes that were readily apparent to the officers at the time.”

Ms. Foxx also said that Officer Solano might have committed “several foot-pursuit policy violations during his pursuit of Mr. Alvarez, such as rounding corners blind without first slowing to assess any danger and not creating distance or waiting for his partner upon observing Mr. Alvarez with the firearm.”

Timothy Grace, a lawyer representing the officers in both cases, said late Tuesday that they were not guilty of any departmental violations. These cases should be judged “not by 20/20 hindsight” but rather by “what the police officers knew at the time.”

“These offenders simply had to listen to the commands of law enforcement and drop the guns, and they didn’t,” Mr. Grace said. “The officers were left with no choice but to defend themselves.”

Christopher Smith, a Chicago lawyer representing Mr. Alvarez’s family, said the officers involved in Mr. Alvarez’s death made decisions to “become the aggressors” and unnecessarily put everyone in a dangerous scenario.

“This wasn’t a situation that needed to be escalated,” Mr. Smith said. “Anthony Alvarez’s comment to the officer right after getting shot said it all. He asked him, ‘Why did you shoot me?’ It wasn’t a scenario where he was doing anything but trying to get away.”

A lawyer representing the family of Adam Toledo could not immediately be reached late Tuesday.

Officer Stillman is still on active duty, while Officer Solano has been relieved of police powers pending an internal investigation, said Thomas J. Ahern, a spokesman for the Chicago Police Department.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/16 South: NKorea projectile launch fails</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/world/asia/north-korea-missile-launch-fail.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/world/asia/north-korea-missile-launch-fail.html</a>
GIST	<p>SEOUL — North Korea launched an unidentified projectile on Wednesday, but it apparently failed “immediately after liftoff,” the South Korean military said.</p> <p>The projectile was launched at 9:30 a.m. from Sunan, outside Pyongyang, the capital, the South Korean military said in a brief statement. It provided no further details, saying that South Korean and United States military intelligence officials were analyzing data from the failed launch.</p> <p>American and South Korean officials said the North launched ballistic missiles from Sunan on <a href="#">Feb. 27</a> and <a href="#">March 5</a>. North Korea said those tests had been part of its preparation to launch a military reconnaissance satellite — a task that its leader, Kim Jong-un, assigned to his government during a <a href="#">Workers’ Party congress</a> in January last year.</p> <p>But Washington and Seoul <a href="#">later said</a> that North Korea had actually been conducting scaled-down tests of its new Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile under the disguise of launching a satellite. The Hwasong-17, the North’s largest known I.C.B.M., was first unveiled during a <a href="#">military parade</a> in October 2020 but had never been tested before.</p>

North Korea has conducted 10 missile or projectile tests so far this year, more than in all of last year. But the isolated country has often [failed in its missile tests](#), especially when it has been developing a new weapon.

The last failure of a missile launch was [reported](#) in August 2017, when one of three short-range ballistic missiles launched by the North blew up immediately after liftoff.

The launch on Wednesday came as the United States and its allies watched Sunan closely amid signs that North Korea was preparing to fire another missile from the site. The Pentagon had said that the North's earlier tests there were to evaluate the Hwasong-17 system "before conducting a test at full range in the future, potentially disguised as a space launch."

The U.N. Security Council has banned North Korea from launching a rocket to place a satellite into orbit because the country has used [such rockets](#) to develop its long-range ballistic missiles.

It was unclear whether the launch on Wednesday was another preparatory test or a full-range launch. In the earlier tests, the missiles flew 168 to 186 miles. Missile experts said that in those tests, North Korea most likely had tested its first-stage booster rocket for the three-stage Hwasong-17 I.C.B.M.

In anticipation of the launch, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command ordered intensified surveillance in the Yellow Sea between China and the Korean Peninsula, as well as enhanced readiness among its ballistic missile defense forces in the region.

This week, the Seventh Fleet of the U.S. Navy said that aircraft taking off from the USS Abraham Lincoln had conducted a drill in the Yellow Sea. The United States military command in South Korea also said it had conducted a missile defense exercise.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Fed officials face economic moving target</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/business/economy/inflation-rates-global-economy.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=Business">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/business/economy/inflation-rates-global-economy.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=Business</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — When Federal Reserve officials raise interest rates on Wednesday, they will do so amid an unfortunate economic reality: Many of the inflationary pressures they had long assumed would dissipate have instead lingered, and some are getting worse.</p> <p>Central bankers have consistently underestimated <a href="#">how high inflation would rise</a>, and how long it would last, as the economy has surged back from pandemic shutdowns. They will release a fresh set of quarterly economic projections Wednesday, in which they are likely to raise their inflation forecasts for the fifth time in a row.</p> <p>Like many private sector forecasters, the Fed misjudged how strong American demand would be for goods and how long that demand would help to keep global supply chains running behind schedule, forces that have combined to push up consumer prices.</p> <p>Officials spent much of the past year expecting a relatively quick return to some pandemic-infused version of normality, but backlogged factories, crowded ports and overburdened trucking companies are still failing to catch up.</p> <p>Repeated waves of the virus have exacerbated the problems, which along with rising wages and services prices have sent inflation higher. Consumer price gains <a href="#">hit a new 40-year high</a> in February, pushed up by rising prices for food, rent and gas.</p> <p>Now, as Fed officials prepare to begin a series of interest rate increases to try to bring inflation under control, they again appear to be aiming at a moving target. Supply chains that showed <a href="#">signs of improvement</a></p>

[in January and February](#) are being thrown further into disarray by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and [sweeping lockdowns in China](#), developments that promise to lengthen delivery times and add to prices.

The war, at the nexus of Europe and Asia, has [scrambled flights and ocean shipments](#); threatened supplies of palladium, nickel and wheat; and sent [energy prices soaring](#), further fueling inflation. Automakers [have shuttered factories](#) because of a shortage of parts, and Russia has answered back to [sweeping sanctions](#) imposed by the West by announcing its own plans for export controls.

In recent days, Chinese cities and provinces have imposed extensive lockdowns to try to stop the spread of the Omicron variant. Shenzhen, a hub of electronics manufacturing and a vital port that is home to 17 million people, announced a lockdown on Sunday night for seven days. Foxconn, a Taiwanese electronics firm that supplies Apple from factories there, said it would suspend operations.

Further restrictions in China, home to more than a quarter of global manufacturing, are likely to reverberate through already-tangled supply chains and exacerbate inflation.

“The question is whether this is going to be bad or very bad,” Phil Levy, chief economist at the logistics company FlexPort, said of the Chinese shutdowns in particular. He noted that this disruption came when shipping delays were already extreme.

“If things get gummed up there, it will reverberate through the whole system,” he said, adding that it matters how long and how sweeping the shutdown proves. “These problems just build.”

Mary Lovely, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said it was “hard to overstate” the importance of Shenzhen and its surrounding area for electronics, as well as for other industries, like metals, furniture and paper products.

“I think it’s definitely going to have effect on supply chains,” she said. She added that she expected those pressures to translate more readily into increased prices than they did earlier in the pandemic.

“Now we’re in a period with higher inflation, I think that suppliers may find it easier to pass those costs along, or take this opportunity to raise prices,” Ms. Lovely said.

Fed officials have held interest rates near zero since March 2020 and are expected to raise them for the first time since 2018 on Wednesday. By making money more expensive to borrow and spend, the Fed is hoping to cool down demand and beat back inflation — helping conditions to even out when a return to “normal” has been painfully, and consistently, elusive.

Fed policymakers and Wall Street researchers alike thought that prices would fade as consumers began shifting their spending from imported goods back to movies, vacations and restaurants. That shift would help factories and shipping routes catch up with surging demand, as used car prices — which spiked last year — moderated. Those trends either haven’t happened, or they have been canceled out by increases in the prices of other products and services.

Jason Furman, an economist at Harvard University, said many forecasters had been doing what investors sometimes refer to as “pricing to perfection”: assuming that everything is going to go well, even if that is not the most likely outcome.

“You can look at the individual items: There’s been a lot of: What if inflation in X, Y, Z goes down?” he said. “And not: What if inflation in A, B, C goes up?”

Many of the factors prompting economists to mark up their inflation forecasts now are not even tied to supply chains.

Matthew Luzzetti, chief U.S. economist at Deutsche Bank, recently revised up his inflation projections because rent costs are rising so rapidly in the Consumer Price Index. Between that and wage growth, he thinks, high inflation will last unless the Fed intervenes.

“For a while, inflation forecasters had been anticipating that the goods side of things would return to more normal dynamics” just as service prices, like rent, began to increase, he said. Services prices have indeed picked up, but normalization in good prices keeps getting “pushed out.”

Consumers continue to spend a bigger share of their budgets on goods instead of services — purchases like travel and manicures — compared with before the pandemic. That has meant global producers are still struggling to keep up with demand. Even potentially short-lived disruptions, like the ones taking place in China, can add to a snowball of delays and shortages.

Data released this month showed that the U.S. trade deficit hit a record in January, the height of the Omicron wave, in part because of surging imports of cars and energy. The average time to ship a container from a Chinese factory to a U.S. warehouse had stretched to 82 days in February, according to Freightos, a logistics platform, up from 45 days two years before.

In many ways, the events of the past few years have been so unusual that few if any forecasters correctly predicted all of them. And Fed officials have acknowledged that they misjudged inflation last year, partly because they expected supply chains to recover more quickly.

They are now striking a more wary tone.

Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chair, told Congress this month that the war in Ukraine was “not going to help at all with supply chains.”

“We haven’t seen much relief on the supply side,” he noted, explaining that he and his colleagues had been waiting for the strains to ease.

Mr. Powell predicted that as the Fed raised interest rates this year, it would help cool off demand for car loans and mortgages, weakening spending in the economy and giving companies some room to catch up with demand. Central bankers are hoping that at the same time, the economy is “going back to normal” in terms of supply chains and the breakdown between goods and services, he said.

Even so, he acknowledged that the Fed stood ready to act more aggressively if that didn’t happen.

“We hope we’re getting help on the inflation front from a bunch of things,” Mr. Powell said. “In any case, we do have the responsibility to generate price stability, and we will use our tools to do that, over time.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 China lockdowns to disrupt supply chains</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/business/covid-china-economy.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=Business">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/business/covid-china-economy.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=Business</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING — Trucks are being delayed by the testing of drivers. Container rates are rising as ships wait for many hours at ports. Products are piling up in warehouses.</p> <p>As Chinese officials scramble to contain the country’s worst outbreak of Covid-19 since early 2020, they are imposing lockdowns and restrictions that are adding chaos to global supply chains. The measures in China, home to about one-third of global manufacturing, are disrupting the production of finished goods like Toyota and Volkswagen cars and Apple’s iPhones, as well as components such as circuit boards and computer cables.</p> <p>Cases rose on Tuesday to more than 5,000 new infections nationwide. That tally is small compared with many other large countries’. But China has taken <a href="#">a zero-tolerance approach</a> to outbreaks that calls for</p>

stringent lockdowns as well as mass testing and quarantine in government facilities. Because several of the country's largest industrial cities are fighting outbreaks, such measures are taking a toll on the factory and transportation networks that are the backbone of China's manufacturing — and the global economy.

After surging last week, [oil prices slid about 5 percent](#) at the start of trading on Monday, in part on fears of an economic slowdown in China. And the global economic harm already caused by China's rise in cases — and the government's tough response — could get worse.

Officials in Beijing and an ever-lengthening list of cities and provinces say that the virus is still spreading and that the government must take ever tougher measures to stop it.

“Recently, local clustered epidemics have occurred in many places in our country, mainly of the Omicron variant, which has spread quickly and is very hidden,” Mi Feng, a spokesman for the National Health and Health Commission, said on Tuesday. “The epidemic prevention and control is more difficult, and the situation is severe and complicated.”

In Jilin Province in China's northeast, which has the biggest concentration of recent cases as well as many factories making cars and car parts, Zhang Li, a deputy director of the provincial health agency, said residents and officials would have to “urgently mobilize and act to overcome difficulties with clenched teeth — we are racing against time.”

To some foreign investors, the outbreak itself may be less unnerving than the unpredictability of government measures. “The business risk in China now is higher than at any time since late spring 2020,” said Julian MacCormac, chairman of the British Chamber of Commerce in China.

Lockdowns have also suspended work at electronics factories in the south and a wide variety of industrial companies in central China. Cities near Shanghai have closed highway exits or demanded that each driver show a negative P.C.R. test — requirements that have also created miles-long lines of trucks trying to carry crucial components among factories.

High international freight costs, a serious problem last year that has contributed to inflation in the United States, have begun climbing again after a dip during the Chinese New Year holiday last month.

The cost to ship a container of goods from Asia to the U.S. West Coast inched up to \$16,353 as of last Friday, before the latest coronavirus restrictions took effect, from \$16,155 a week earlier. Rates have almost tripled from a year ago and have risen 12-fold from two years ago, according to data from Freightos, a freight booking platform.

Ports in China now require workers to live and work at the docks for as long as two months at a time, away from their families, to prevent infections. That has allowed the ports to keep operating even during sustained outbreaks, in contrast with severe shipping delays last spring and summer when infections forced extended closings of big container terminals in Shenzhen and near Shanghai.

But with truck traffic to the docks interrupted, ships are facing delays at the ports of at least 12 hours, and may soon have to wait for as long as two weeks, said Julie Gerdeman, chief executive of Everstream Analytics, a supply chain analysis firm.

“Even the most prepared businesses will be impacted by these new lockdowns in China, as flexibility within the supply chain is minimal,” she said.

Airfreight is also facing fresh complications. The Civil Aviation Administration of China said Tuesday that many of the remaining international flights into Shanghai's vast Pudong airport would be rerouted to other Chinese cities from next Monday until May 1. The measure would free quarantine rooms in Shanghai for the city's residents and close contacts, but further delay exports.

At least five large factory cities have completely shut down because of the coronavirus: Dongguan and Shenzhen in southern China near Hong Kong, where Foxconn has huge factories to make iPhones and other Apple products; Changchun and Jilin City in Jilin Province; and Langfang, next to Beijing. Some smaller cities have also gone into lockdowns, like Suifenhe and Manzhouli on China's border with Russia.

In Dongguan, an industrial city of 7.5 million people, some factory owners said they were still being allowed to operate as long as their workers lived in dormitories inside factory compounds, and no one was allowed to leave or enter.

Deng Shiwen, the owner of a small factory that makes packaging materials in Dongguan, said that his several dozen employees were still living and working inside the compound but that he could not ship anything to customers.

"I just leave the newly made stuff here for now," he said.

Other cities, notably Shanghai, have not declared citywide lockdowns but have closed so many neighborhoods, shopping malls and industrial parks at least temporarily that companies are encouraging employees to work from home as much as possible.

Hour by hour through Monday and Tuesday, the list of companies announcing production halts because of lockdowns grew. Toyota and Volkswagen stopped their assembly plants and other factories in Changchun. A printed circuit board maker, Unimicron Technology, in Shenzhen. Global Lighting Technologies, a light-emitting diode, or LED, maker, in Shanghai.

Some companies, like Foxconn, said they would try to shift production to other plants. But Mary E. Lovely, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said it seemed "hard to believe" that Foxconn would have slack at other facilities that could accommodate its vast operations near Hong Kong.

In the end, Foxconn and other companies are likely to prioritize certain major customers, like Apple. "So you're going to see the same thing you saw before, which is that smaller companies that depend on these imported parts and equipment from China are going to be hit," Ms. Lovely said.

"You know that China is going to do everything it can to get this under control. The question is what's stronger, the Chinese government or the virus," she said, adding, "We know that Omicron is quite a formidable opponent."

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Amazon pulls workers downtown Seattle</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/citing-crime-concerns-amazon-pulls-workers-from-office-at-former-site-of-seattle-macys/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/citing-crime-concerns-amazon-pulls-workers-from-office-at-former-site-of-seattle-macys/</a>
GIST	<p>In downtown Seattle's commercial core, retail workers have doubled as first responders, doormen have been deployed to keep unwelcome visitors out and some buildings are still sitting empty as employers worry about the safety of workers and customers.</p> <p>Amazon is the latest company to react.</p> <p>It is temporarily <a href="#">moving workers from its space</a> in the building at Third Avenue and Pine Street that <a href="#">until 2019 held the downtown Macy's store</a>, a spokesperson for the company said Friday. The office's 1,800 employees have been working remotely during the pandemic; rather than returning to the desks they left over two years ago, workers will move to other locations in South Lake Union. Remote work is still an option for Amazon employees.</p> <p>"Given recent incidents near 3rd and Pine, we're providing employees currently at that location with alternative office space elsewhere," the spokesperson said in an emailed statement. "We are hopeful that</p>



conditions will improve and that we will be able to bring employees back to this location when it is safe to do so.”

Amazon moved into the [312,000-square-foot location in 2017](#), taking over the top six floors of the old Macy’s building. The office at 300 Pine St. is about a half-mile from the company’s headquarters on Seventh Avenue.

Since Feb. 21, there have been at least three shootings, two stabbings and one carjacking in the area, according to the Seattle Police Department.

“This is a challenging time for employers and employees,” said Rachel Smith, president and CEO of the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, which represents 2,500 businesses. “I know our employers are trying to do everything they can.”

Olga Sagan, owner of Piroshky Piroshky, decided in February to [close the bakery’s Third and Pike Street location](#), citing high crime in the area and fears about employee and customer safety.

Addressing safety concerns is a “precondition” for many employers considering bringing workers back to the office, said Jon Scholes, president and CEO of the Downtown Seattle Association.

In a survey of 200 employers last December, 70% said they believed they would bring workers back to the office for the majority of the week — but the most important condition holding them to that decision was action to address homelessness and public safety, he said.

Third and Pine is a “lobby” for Seattle, Scholes said, and with more than 50,000 people moving through it on the bus in the pre-pandemic days, safety concerns there will affect other businesses around the city.

“What happens on Third is really critical to the rest of downtown’s ability to bring more office workers back,” he said. “It’s the worst-kept secret in Seattle, and it’s been that way for quite some time.”

Other companies are choosing to stay. Smith, from the Chamber of Commerce, said businesses are concerned about gun violence, organized retail theft, drug activity and safe access to transit stations, but hasn’t heard of any members that plan to follow Amazon’s lead and leave the area.

Starbucks, which has a store a block away on Fourth Avenue and Pine Street, said it plans to continue operating as usual. Timber company Weyerhaeuser initially [delayed plans to return](#) to its Pioneer Square headquarters over safety concerns, but reversed course in February and announced the [office would reopen in April](#).

At Mario’s, a clothing store on Sixth Avenue, president Mario Bisio says he is worried about violence near the store but is also committed to staying in the area.

“We have been in Seattle for 40 years. We believe in the city. We’re optimistic that they’ll turn around. But have we really seen it downtown? Not yet,” Bisio said.

There’s a doorman at the entrance of the store, both to welcome customers and to keep people out as needed, Bisio said. Employees feel comfortable during the day but like having an escort to their car or their home when leaving a shift.

Seeing Amazon leave the area, if only temporarily, is demoralizing, Bisio said.

“It sends a very negative message to our clients and to the community on the state of affairs of downtown Seattle,” he said. “We pray that there will be a time in the future that people can bring their family downtown in the evening, feel safe to shop, walk the streets and go to restaurants. That is not the case today.”

	<p>A self-described eternal optimist, Bisio says Mario's wants to "fight for the resilience of Seattle."</p> <p>Businesses are sure to feel the economic impact of Amazon moving its workers away from Third and Pine, said Steve Burke, the western regional manager for the Washington Small Business Development Center.</p> <p>But, having passed the two-year mark from when Amazon and other employers first sent employees to work from home, he said, that impact likely won't be anything new.</p> <p>Scholes, of the Downtown Seattle Association, said many businesses have been waiting for office workers to return. Without that foot traffic, he expects to see fewer coffee shops, flower shops and other small businesses, he said. And with that, fewer jobs.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Sewer data: bump in Covid cases after lull</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/u-s-sewer-data-warns-of-a-new-bump-in-covid-cases-after-lull/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/u-s-sewer-data-warns-of-a-new-bump-in-covid-cases-after-lull/</a>
GIST	<p>A wastewater network that monitors for COVID-19 trends is warning that cases are once again rising in many parts of the U.S., according to an analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data by Bloomberg.</p> <p>More than a third of the CDC's wastewater sample sites across the U.S. showed rising COVID-19 trends March 1 to March 10, though reported cases have stayed near a recent low. The number of sites with rising signals of COVID-19 cases is nearly twice what it was during the Feb. 1 to Feb. 10 period, when the wave of omicron-variant cases was fading rapidly.</p> <p>It's not clear how many new infections the signs in the sewage represent and if they will turn into a new wave, or will be just a brief bump on the way down from the last one. In many parts of the country, people are returning back to offices and mask rules have been loosened — factors that can raise transmission. At the same time, warmer weather is allowing people to spend more time outside, and many people have recently been infected, which may offer at least temporary protection against getting sick again — factors that would keep cases down.</p> <p>"While wastewater levels are generally very low across the board, we are seeing an uptick of sites reporting an increase," Amy Kirby, the head of the CDC's wastewater monitoring program, said in an email to Bloomberg. "These bumps may simply reflect minor increases from very low levels to still low levels. Some communities, though, may be starting to see an increase in COVID-19 infections, as prevention strategies in many states have changed in recent weeks."</p> <p>Bloomberg reviewed data for more than 530 sewage monitoring sites, looking at the most recent data reported during the 10-day window from March 1 to March 10. Out of those sites, 59% showed falling COVID-19 trends, 5% were roughly stable, and 36% were increasing. Rises or declines are measured over a 15-day period.</p> <p>Fewer sites had data during the Feb. 1 to Feb. 10 window. During that period, 80% of sites showed a decreasing trend, 5% were stable, and 15% were rising.</p> <p>Wastewater samples can't tell how many people have COVID-19. Instead, they measure how much of the virus is being found in sewer water. A high concentration in a sample can indicate a rising number of infections, often days before those cases show up in tests.</p> <p>Official case numbers determined through COVID-19 tests have become increasingly unreliable. With wider access to at-home tests, many infections — particularly mild ones — are never reported. The proportion of unreported cases can be even higher in the middle of surges and at times when tests have been hard to come by.</p>

In the greater New York City area, for example, there are signs of an increase. While most of the region's sampling sites do not have recent data, a wastewater site in Fairfield, Connecticut, shows a high rate of increase. A site in Nassau County shows a moderate increase in COVID-19 detection.

"It's too early to know if this current trend will continue or whether we'll see a corresponding increase in reported cases across the country," said the CDC's Kirby. "We encourage local health officials to monitor their numbers closely and use these data as an early warning sign if wastewater levels continue to increase."

In some places, the signals are less than clear. In Miami-Dade County, for example, one sample site shows a decline in the amount of COVID-19 found in wastewater. But two other sites for the county show an increase. It's possible the data are finding the beginnings of a small, still-local cluster of cases. Or the data could be based on a relatively low level of virus found, exaggerating the size of the change because of the low baseline.

People infected with the coronavirus shed viral particles in their stool, which then flows into the sewer system when they use the toilet. Because people begin to give off the virus early in the course of infection, wastewater samples can identify a rising trend of infections early on.

So far, the warning given by the sewer networks hasn't shown up in case numbers and the number of patients being hospitalized for COVID-19 is still near recent lows. The 65-and-older population in the U.S. — among the most vulnerable to severe COVID-19, hospitalization and death — is also the country's best-vaccinated demographic. Eighty nine percent of that group is fully vaccinated, and 67% of those people have received a booster dose.

The increase in COVID-19 wastewater warnings comes about two weeks after the CDC changed its recommendations to the country on masking and other public health measures. The agency revamped its recommendations to focus in part on making sure hospitals were not overwhelmed, and put much of the country in its "low" level of COVID-19 risk.

According to the CDC's latest community levels rating, 98% of the U.S. population is in places with a "low" community level rating. Those ratings, however, are based on case numbers and hospitalizations. Wastewater data can often pick up a rise in cases several days before case numbers rise.

Cases are on the rise in several European countries after the continent went through a similar pattern to the U.S. Germany, Switzerland and Austria, as well as other European countries, have all reported significant increases in case numbers over the last two weeks. U.S. trends often follow what happens in Europe, given the rough similarities in the climate, population and public health approach.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Last escapee youth facility in custody</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/final-teen-echo-glen-youth-detention-facility-escapee-in-custody/281-89f4b2dd-5792-46fc-b2d7-785a6599dcaf">https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/final-teen-echo-glen-youth-detention-facility-escapee-in-custody/281-89f4b2dd-5792-46fc-b2d7-785a6599dcaf</a>
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — The last of five teenagers who escaped from a Snoqualmie youth detention center in January was apprehended Monday, the Washington Department of Children, Youth and Families announced Tuesday.</p> <p>The teenager was taken into custody without incident, DCYF said, but provided no other details about where or how the teen was found.</p> <p>According to court documents, five teens overpowered staff at the Echo Glen Children's Center on the morning of Jan. 26 and locked them in cells before escaping in a Ford Focus.</p> <p>Three of the teens were apprehended the next day, two in Kent and one in Kirkland. A fourth was caught on Feb. 1 in Kent, where officers also managed to recover the stolen Ford Focus abandoned at a city park.</p>

All of the teens face charges of escape in the first degree, kidnapping in the first degree, unlawful imprisonment, two counts of robbery in the first degree and theft of a motor vehicle.

One of the teens who stands accused of brandishing a knife at a staff member and wounding a staff member also faces second-degree assault charges.

Two of the teens, aged 16 and 17-years-old, will be charged as adults, according to state law. The King County Prosecutor's Office also made a motion to charge a third teen with a past adjudication for murder as an adult.

Juveniles convicted in adult court or people convicted of crimes they committed before their 18th birthday, do not face sentencing under adult guidelines, allowing judges to go below the standard sentencing ranges applicable to adults, according to the prosecutor's office.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 King Co. police shooting deaths inquests</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/king-county-inquests-resume/281-fb46f470-d54d-4776-92b3-a837eadc05a1">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/king-county-inquests-resume/281-fb46f470-d54d-4776-92b3-a837eadc05a1</a>
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — King County resumed inquests into deaths caused by law enforcement officers Tuesday <a href="#">following years of legal challenges</a>.</p> <p>Inquests are administrative, fact-finding investigations that occur whenever a law enforcement officer is involved in a shooting death.</p> <p>The first inquest hearing to resume involves the <a href="#">shooting death of 19-year-old Damarius Butts</a> in April 2017. Butts was shot and killed by Seattle police during an exchange of gunfire after allegedly robbing a 7-Eleven store. Three officers were injured in the shooting, including one officer who was shot in the face.</p> <p>Proceedings are expected to last about two weeks. Michael Spearman will serve as the inquest administrator, <a href="#">according to Constantine's office</a>. Spearman is a retired King County Superior Court and Washington Court of Appeals judge.</p> <p>Police shooting inquests have been delayed for years after King County Executive Dow Constantine paused inquests in 2018 to “address concerns of fairness and transparency and pushed forward with a new process built on stakeholder and community input.”</p> <p>Constantine issued several executive orders concerning death inquests in 2018 that would provide attorneys to families of those killed by law enforcement through the Department of Public Defense and expanded the fact-finding scope of the inquest to include testimony about training and policies as well as determining if the officer involved followed protocol.</p> <p>Several jurisdictions challenged the process in court, arguing it was not within Constantine's authority to make changes to the inquest process. However, their objections were largely struck down and the Washington State Supreme Court reaffirmed Constantine's order in 2021.</p> <p>Constantine <a href="#">issued an executive order in July 2021</a> to bring King County's inquest process in line with a state <a href="#">Supreme Court ruling</a>. The executive order allows for inquest panels to determine whether a person killed by law enforcement died by "criminal means," an amendment to a previous executive order fought for by family members of several people killed by King County law enforcement.</p> <p>The executive orders previously barred law enforcement officers from participating in inquests unless they agreed to testify, but that was amended in another executive order in 2020. Officers may still be subpoenaed to testify at trial like any other witness.</p>

	<p>"The road has been long, but I am thankful we can begin conducting inquests and providing the public with answers," <a href="#">said</a> Constantine. "The pandemic and legal challenges aside, building a process that the public can have faith in has been a difficult but necessary task, and I hope it can provide closure in these difficult and heartbreaking cases."</p> <p>Constantine's office said there are seven inquests called. The hearing involving the death of Damarius Butts began Tuesday, and two others involving the deaths of Albert Fredericks and Robert Lightfeather are expected to begin in the next several months.</p> <p>The King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office is reviewing dozens of other cases for inquest proceeding referrals, according to Constantine's office.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Spokane traffic enforcement officers return</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/spokane-county/spd-traffic-officers-return-skyrocketing-injury-crashes-in-spokane/293-5dfde29d-9c56-42c4-81db-0f4b484ccb69">https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/spokane-county/spd-traffic-officers-return-skyrocketing-injury-crashes-in-spokane/293-5dfde29d-9c56-42c4-81db-0f4b484ccb69</a>
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — The Spokane Police Department (SPD) moved its only five traffic officers to patrol last fall to meet its staffing shortage. But now, four full-time traffic enforcement officers are back.</p> <p>"We were able to get those patrol staffing numbers back up to a point that I could get a unit back," SPD traffic supervisor Sgt. Teresa Fuller said.</p> <p>During their absence, Spokane neighborhood councils claimed more people got away with speeding and more people got injured in crashes.</p> <p>Spokane went without traffic officers from September 19, 2021, to January 1, 2022. Compared to the same time frame a year ago (Sept. 2020-Jan. 2021), SPD found injury crashes increased by 70%, jumping from 328 to 553.</p> <p>Additionally, fatal crashes doubled from 5% to 10%.</p> <p>Sgt. Fuller said this shows how necessary traffic officers are in the city of Spokane.</p> <p>"My guys are out there enforcing traffic laws and helping prevent injuries and deaths on our roadways," Fuller said. "That's what the numbers tell me."</p> <p>She said that during the pandemic, people took advantage of less traffic on the roads and picked up poor driving behaviors.</p> <p>"Those dangerous behaviors that a lot of people developed when they had the ability to are staying," she said. "So we're just trying to get a grasp on that and really go back to pre-COVID numbers."</p> <p>SPD's traffic unit is budgeted for six total positions. Sgt. Fuller hopes to have a fully staffed unit soon.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/14 DOH: 1,440,632 cases, 12,219 deaths</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article259399194.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article259399194.html</a>
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 304 new COVID-19 cases Monday.</p> <p>As of Monday, the state's preliminary death tally was 12,219. The confirmed death tally as of Feb. 25 was 12,072.</p> <p>The state reported 958 cases Sunday and 1,535 cases Saturday.</p>

	The statewide case total from the illness caused by the coronavirus stood at 1,440,632 cases on Monday.
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Idaho hospital lockdown amid protest call</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Idaho-hospital-locks-down-amid-far-right-call-for-17004512.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Idaho-hospital-locks-down-amid-far-right-call-for-17004512.php</a>
GIST	<p>BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A major Boise hospital went on lockdown for about an hour Tuesday after far-right activist Ammon Bundy urged supporters to go the facility in protest of a child protection case involving one of his family friends.</p> <p>St. Luke's Health System put the Boise Medical Center on lockdown and began diverting incoming patients about 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday.</p> <p>“Safety is our top priority,” the hospital said in a statement. “At this time, anyone in need of care should seek alternative health care providers and options. We ask that people please avoid the area near the Boise hospital until further notice.”</p> <p>Several police cars from the Idaho State Police and Boise Police Department responded to the hospital for the protest.</p> <p>A few dozen protesters stationed themselves outside various hospital doors and buildings, some speculating on social media about whether the facility could be accessed via underground tunnels. The protesters appeared to mostly stay on sidewalks, however, and the lockdown was lifted shortly before 3 p.m.</p> <p>Earlier in the day, Bundy released a statement on YouTube warning that if an acquaintance's young child was not returned to the family after a hearing Tuesday afternoon, that “patriot groups” would take action.</p> <p>Bundy later released another video telling people that child protection workers were poised to move the baby from the hospital to a foster home, and telling them to show up at the facility immediately.</p> <p>The baby was temporarily removed from from family custody last Friday after officials determined the 10-month-old was “suffering from severe malnourishment” and at risk of injury or death, according to a statement from police in the city of Meridian near Boise.</p> <p>The baby's parents had refused to let officers check on the child's welfare after the family canceled a medical appointment, the police statement said.</p> <p>Bundy, who is well-known for participating in armed standoffs with law enforcement, was arrested the following day on a misdemeanor trespassing charge after he protested at a different hospital where he believed the baby was being treated.</p> <p>Bundy's People's Rights group has characterized the intervention as “medical kidnapping” and “child trafficking” on social media platforms.</p> <p>In an earlier YouTube video, Bundy asked followers to protest at the homes of child protection service workers, law enforcement officers and others involved in the protection case.</p> <p>“I’m not OK with any of this — to be honest with you if justice was to be served, we would go into the hospital, take that baby and we would give it back to their mother,” Bundy said.</p> <p>He added: “And if we were further to administrate justice, we would find those that are accountable and we would prosecute them, and uh, you know, make them pay for the damages that they caused for this family and assure that this never happened again. That’s what should happen.”</p>



	<p>Still, he said people should wait until after a hearing scheduled for 1 p.m. that was expected to determine if the child could immediately return home.</p> <p>“This judge, if he doesn’t return this family back, knowing and seeing the information that is out there ... if he doesn’t straighten this out, then we may have to straighten it out for him,” Bundy said. “And that’s not going to be pretty. It’s going to be difficult.”</p> <p>In the video made later that day, Bundy characterized the situation as an emergency and directed people to the Boise hospital because he said the baby was going to be taken to a foster home.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/15 Amazon: affordable housing near transit</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Amazon-to-build-affordable-housing-near-transit-17003730.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Amazon-to-build-affordable-housing-near-transit-17003730.php</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — Amazon said Tuesday it will spend more than \$120 million to build affordable-housing units close to transit stations near Seattle and Washington, D.C, the latest example of a tech company trying to address the affordable housing crisis critics say the industry has exacerbated.</p> <p>Amazon said it is working with Sound Transit and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority to construct a total of 1,060 homes near four public transit sites. The Washington state sites are in SeaTac and Bellevue. The other sites are Maryland in the cities of New Carrollton and College Park.</p> <p>Amazon is building out another corporate hub in Arlington, Virginia, and is expanding operations in Bellevue, near its Seattle headquarters.</p> <p>“We know that our investment in these areas brings many economic opportunities for residents in the region, but we also acknowledge that this growth needs to benefit everyone in the community,” Catherine Buell, director of the Amazon Housing Equity Fund, said in a statement.</p> <p>That funding comes from a commitment Amazon made in January 2021 to launch its Housing Equity Fund, a \$2 billion initiative to preserve and create 20,000 affordable homes.</p> <p>Microsoft has said it will spend at least \$750 million toward affordable housing in the Seattle area following years of complaints that the tech boom had worsened the problem as salaries in the sector and housing prices escalated.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/15 Airline ticket sales exceed 2019 milestone</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/business/airlines-travel.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/business/airlines-travel.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Rising fuel prices may present an obstacle, but the airline recovery in the United States appears to be on track for now.</p> <p>With the Omicron coronavirus variant receding and pandemic restrictions being eased, the airline industry turned a corner last month, according to an analysis by the Adobe Digital Economy Index, which draws on online sales from six of the top 10 U.S. airlines. According to the analysis, ticket sales for domestic flights in February exceeded those for the same month in 2019, a first since the pandemic began two years ago.</p> <p>“We’re seeing things open up in terms of people’s thinking about travel,” said Vivek Pandya, who led the analysis. “The question now becomes: How much can that momentum continue to push forward?”</p> <p>Travelers spent an estimated \$6.6 billion on domestic flights in February, about 6 percent more than three years earlier, according to the analysis. The number of tickets sold was up 4 percent, while fares were up about 5 percent, lagging overall inflation. Early data indicate that the trends are holding up this month, too.</p>

The data bodes well for airlines, which have been preparing for months for what the industry expects to be a robust summer travel season. It also matches the optimism that several carriers expressed at an investor conference held by J.P. Morgan on Tuesday.

Speaking at the conference, executives of American Airlines and Delta Air Lines said they saw record daily sales last week. In investor updates, Delta said it expected revenue for the quarter to slightly exceed its previous estimates, while United Airlines said corporate travel was improving faster than expected, reaching the highest level since the pandemic began. American said improvement in revenues would “more than offset” the increase in fuel prices, which have spiked since Russia went to war in Ukraine.

Southwest Airlines also improved its forecast, saying it expected operating revenue in the first quarter of this year to be down 8 to 10 percent compared with the same quarter of 2019. The airline had previously forecast that operating revenues would be off 10 to 15 percent.

Consumers appear to be optimistic, too: The number of tickets sold last month for domestic travel between June and August was down just 3 percent from the number sold in February 2019, according to the Adobe analysis. Most travelers, though, book summer travel closer to the date of departure.

But while hopes are high for the months ahead, there is concern that rising fuel prices and persistent inflation could pressure airlines to raise fares and discourage potential customers from flying.

“Between the fuel impact and the discretionary income impact on leisure travelers, it’s going to slow whatever would have been happening,” said Samuel Engel, a senior vice president and airline industry analyst at ICF, an advisory firm.

JetBlue, for example, said in an investor update on Tuesday that it had “moderated” its flight plans for the first quarter of this year because of the rise in fuel costs. Still, it joined other airlines in upgrading its forecast: The airline expects revenue in the first three months of the year to be down 6 to 9 percent from the same period in 2019, compared with its previous forecast: a decline of 11 to 16 percent.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine sent oil prices soaring, raising the cost of jet fuel, which is one of the biggest line-item expenses for airlines. And while the global price of jet fuel has declined from its post-invasion peak, it ended last week up 19.5 percent from a month earlier and up about 82 percent over the last year, according to the Platts Jet Fuel Price Index.

American and United are particularly exposed to ballooning fuel costs, while Delta is somewhat insulated thanks to its refinery in Trainer, Pa. Southwest employs a financial strategy known as “hedging” to offset spikes in the price of fuel, which it estimated will cover as much as 64 percent of the fuel it could consume this year.

U.S. airlines will try to cover fuel-price increases by raising fares, a process that can take months to play out. Carriers are typically limited in how much they can pass on to customers, industry analysts said, but airline executives are more optimistic.

Speaking at the J.P. Morgan conference on Tuesday, Glen Hauenstein, the president of Delta Air Lines, said that the airline could “easily” increase fares in the second quarter of the year to make up for rising fuel costs, faster than normal because customers are booking flights closer to the date of travel. On an average one-way ticket price of about \$200, the airline will need to recover \$15 to \$20, he said. A United Airlines executive was similarly optimistic that the airline would be able to pass on fuel costs to customers in higher fares.

But with the rebound being led by leisure travelers, who are far more sensitive to ticket prices than corporate travelers, airlines will have to tread carefully when it comes to raising prices. Other options include cutting flights that are barely profitable or reining in plans to restore flights, as some airlines have already started to do.

“In general, growth may slow, or, as is the current case, capacity that airlines would have brought back if the pandemic continued to recede won’t return,” Helane Becker, an airline analyst at the investment bank Cowen, wrote in a recent research note.

At the same time, some consumers facing higher prices for goods and services may not have much left to spend on vacations, experts said. And while some budget carriers may target those travelers, there’s no guarantee that airlines will be willing to cut fares, especially when facing steep debt accrued during the pandemic and pressure from shareholders eager to see profits, said Henry Harteveltdt, a travel industry analyst and the president of Atmosphere Research Group.

“Airline C.E.O.s are not in a generous state of mind these days, nor are their C.F.O.s, so I’m not expecting airlines to discount seats to the same extent that we may have otherwise seen,” he said. “I think that there’s a lot of pressure on airlines to keep their airfares as high they can.”

Depending on how Russia’s war on Ukraine plays out, airlines may also not see the rebound in lucrative trans-Atlantic travel that they had expected, either, experts said. But domestic and short-distance international travel has and will continue to lead the recovery. And despite the hurdles in the industry’s way, analysts and airlines are preparing for a strong summer season.

“What we’ll end up with is a domestic summer that looks very good as opposed to great,” Mr. Engel said.

As of Monday, airlines had more than 2.1 million domestic flights scheduled from June to August, according to Cirium, an aviation data provider. That figure could change substantially in the intervening months, but is currently just 8 percent lower than the number of flights scheduled over the same months in 2019. Last summer’s scheduled flights were down 16 percent from the summer of 2019.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Impunity Syria war crimes; lessons for Putin</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/middleeast/syria-ukraine-invasion-russia.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/middleeast/syria-ukraine-invasion-russia.html</a>
GIST	<p>BEIRUT, Lebanon — The Syrian police stormed her house and dragged her husband away. Her eldest son died in a rain of Syrian government shells on her hometown. So like millions of other Syrians, Hanadi Hafisi fled the country with plans to return when the war ended.</p> <p>A decade later, she’s still a refugee in Turkey, where her work at a center that treats war injuries exposes her to a constant display of the human destruction wrought by President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and his Russian backers: paralysis, missing hands and legs, and deep trauma that leaves her patients asking why such disasters consumed their lives.</p> <p>“I don’t know what to tell them when they ask me whether they will reach justice,” said Ms. Hafisi, 46. “Seriously, what to tell them? That Bashar will be held accountable? That he will face trial? Of course not.”</p> <p>As the world takes in the grim realities of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine — the once-vibrant neighborhoods bombed out, the civilians killed by shells while trying to flee, the speculation about whether Russia will use chemical weapons — many Syrians have watched with a horrifying sense of déjà vu and a deep foreboding about what lies ahead.</p> <p>The Syrian war began 11 years ago this month with an anti-Assad uprising that spiraled into a multisided conflict among the government, armed rebels, jihadists and others. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed, millions have fled their homes, and Mr. al-Assad has remained in power, in large part because of the extensive support he received from the man now driving the invasion of Ukraine, President Vladimir V. Putin Russia.</p> <p>The legacy of Syria’s war, and Russia’s role in it, looms large over Ukraine, offering potential lessons to Mr. Putin, analysts said: that “red lines” laid down by the West can be crossed without long-term</p>

consequences; that diplomacy purportedly aimed at stopping violence can be used to distract from it; and that autocrats can do terrible things and face international sanctions — and still stay in power.

Much of the brutality Mr. al-Assad deployed to quash his foes was documented in real time and spurred outrage that left many thinking he could never get away with it.

He dispatched soldiers and armed thugs to stop protests by locking up activists and firing live ammunition into crowds. As the opposition took up arms, his troops shelled, bombed and imposed starvation sieges on towns and neighborhoods that supported the rebels.

Those actions killed large numbers of civilians and sent many more fleeing for their lives. More than half of Syria's prewar population was displaced during the war, and 5.7 million refugees remain outside the country.

In August 2013, Mr. al-Assad's forces shocked the world by deploying chemical weapons on rebel-held towns near the capital, Damascus, killing more than 1,400 people, U.S. officials said.

Many Syrians expected that such a blatant violation of international law would prompt Western military intervention, especially since President Barack Obama had called the use of chemical weapons a "red line."

"I was sure we had witnessed something very few people had experienced before, like those who witnessed Chernobyl or Hiroshima," recalled Ibrahim Alfawal, 29, who survived the chemical attack and said it had felt like "judgment day."

But he was shocked when the United States did not intervene. Mr. al-Assad's forces eventually took control of the towns that had been gassed, seeming to pay no price for his use of forbidden arms.

That seemed to show that Mr. al-Assad could count on impunity, Mr. Alfawal said, and attacks by Syrian forces on civilian infrastructure — including schools, hospitals, neighborhoods and bakeries where families had lined up to buy bread — only escalated.

In 2015, Mr. Putin sent Russian forces to help Mr. al-Assad's beleaguered army, and soon Russian officers were advising Syrian forces and Russian jets were dropping bombs on Syrian cities — enjoying the same impunity that Mr. al-Assad seemed to have.

In Ukraine, Russia has used disinformation campaigns similar to those it pioneered in Syria, where it falsely branded opposition activists as members of Al Qaeda and accused the rebels of launching the chemical attacks as "false flag" operations to blame the Syrian government.

"They are taking the same concept they used in Syria, to lie and to stick to it," Mr. Alfawal said of Russia's approach to Ukraine.

The chemical attacks in Syria continued. In addition to two that killed large numbers of people — in the village of Khan Sheikhoun in 2017 and east of Damascus in 2018 — there have been at least 350 other attacks with chemical substances, according to Tobias Schneider, a researcher at the Global Public Policy Institute in Berlin.

Most of those used chlorine, which is not classified as a chemical weapon but can be used as such to terrify civilians and encourage them to flee.

While no evidence has surfaced that Russian forces used chemical weapons in Syria, researchers believe that Mr. Putin enabled Mr. al-Assad to do so.

"It is absolutely certain that the Russian government at least knows and likely facilitated the use of chemical weapons by the Syrians, mostly chlorine attacks," Mr. Schneider said.

There are no indications that chemical weapons have been used in Ukraine, but watching the war there, many Syrians see signs that Mr. Putin is employing parts of the Syria playbook.

The Russians “are willing to devour the green and the dry,” said Radwan Alhomsy, a Syrian activist in southern Turkey, using an Arabic idiom meaning to destroy everything. “They don’t care about the international community or anything else. We saw that in Syria. Burning schools is not new to us. It’s land they want to take, and they will take it.”

European analysts point out the differences between the wars in Syria and Ukraine that could lead to different Western responses. Unlike Mr. Putin, Mr. al-Assad fought to regain control of his own country, not take over one of his neighbors. Unlike Syria, Russia is a nuclear-armed power, complicating the issue of military intervention.

And while the United States and its European allies largely let Mr. al-Assad get away with using chemical weapons in the Middle East, Mr. Putin’s doing so on the European continent would most likely cause greater alarm and elicit a stiffer response.

“If Putin thinks that he’ll be treated like al-Assad, he is wrong because he is not al-Assad and this is not Syria,” said Patricia Lewis, director of the international security program at Chatham House.

Still, Mr. Putin could take some solace from Mr. al-Assad’s survival: how the West went on mistakenly believing that Mr. al-Assad’s fall was unavoidable, and how he has clung to power despite sanctions that have strangled his economy and impoverished his people.

Emile Hokayem, a Middle East analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, warned of two strategies used in Syria that the Russians could employ in Ukraine.

One was Russia’s engagement in international diplomacy aimed at ending the violence as a way of distracting the West from the war on the ground. Another was the deliberate creation of a refugee crisis to bog down Europe and sap its resources.

“Creating a humanitarian catastrophe is part of the war strategy, not a secondary effect, because this is how you shift the burden on to the other side,” he said.

Many Syrian refugees are watching the Ukraine war from impoverished camps across the Middle East or from European cities where they are struggling to start new lives.

While some feel bitter about the warmth shown to fleeing Ukrainians, the Syrians also recall their own war, and hope the Ukrainians will fare better than they did.

“We were left alone to face our destiny,” said Mansour Abu al-Kheir, who survived two chemical attacks east of Damascus before fleeing as a refugee to southern Turkey. “I hope this won’t happen to the Ukrainians.”

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 NTSB: loose bolt triggered ferry engine fire</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/ntsb-loose-bolt-triggered-ferry-wenatchees-engine-fire/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/ntsb-loose-bolt-triggered-ferry-wenatchees-engine-fire/</a>
GIST	<p>An engine fire last spring inside the Washington state ferry Wenatchee was caused by an insufficiently torqued bolt, which set off a chain reaction of broken parts and overheating, said a National Transportation Safety Board <a href="#">report released Tuesday</a>.</p> <p>The NTSB praised the 13-member ferry crew for stopping the fire within two to three minutes.</p>

There were no injuries during the April 22, 2021, incident, which happened on a test sailing after a series of repairs. However, the fire caused \$3.8 million in damage and kept the Wenatchee out of service for nine months, which aggravated crew shortages, a lack of boats, and canceled trips across Puget Sound.

The 14-page NTSB summary report says an oiler discovered white smoke in an engine room while the ferry was heading toward Eagle Harbor at full power. Another crew member near the control panels “saw fire, smoke and debris flying everywhere.” The captain observed black smoke billowing from the stack.

Afterward, engineers found a large rod and piston strewn on the steel engine-room floor. Forensic investigations found two broken bolts and another that unfastened while the engine was running. They were supposed to be torqued to 75 foot-pounds.

By magnifying the grooves, engineers confirmed the “backed off” or unfastened nut hadn’t been tightened enough, which led to other parts misaligning, then a loss of lubricating oil. Hot gases spewed into the engine room and exploded.

Crew members rapidly shut all doors, fans and valves in the area to starve the area of fuel and oxygen, while five crew donned firefighting gear. But they didn’t need to apply water or carbon dioxide.

Washington State Ferries’ own investigation is still underway, said spokesperson Ian Sterling. “We’re proud of our crew that was on board,” he said. “That’s what they train for. This incident mirrors one of their scenarios.” Ferry officials have added engine room cameras, and will require secondary inspections of critical engine work including bolts, NTSB wrote.

The technicians worked for a Seattle-based marine contractor. A claim has been filed with the state’s insurer to pay for the damage, Sterling said.

The [Wenatchee](#) returned to service [in late January](#) and serves the [Bainbridge Island-Seattle route](#). The boat was built in 1998 to a maximum capacity of 2,500 people and 202 vehicles. State lawmakers this year have increased spending for maintenance and to build four new ferries.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Ukraine war impact on Washington wheat</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/what-russias-war-in-ukraine-means-for-was-wheat-market/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/what-russias-war-in-ukraine-means-for-was-wheat-market/</a>
GIST	<p>Mike Carstensen has seen prices for the wheat he grows on his Lincoln County farm rise from \$8.16 in January to \$9.26 per bushel, although the price fluctuates. It’s a nice bump, he said, but it’s not enough to make up for the one-third increase in costs from rising gasoline prices over the same period.</p> <p>Both appear to be ripples from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, one of the largest wheat exporters in the world.</p> <p>U.S. wheat prices were already high because of inflation and restricted supplies, but Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has driven up prices of wheat globally and could further increase the prices of U.S. wheat, said Randy Fortenbery, Thomas B. Mick chair in economics at Washington State University.</p> <p>Russia and Ukraine supply nearly 30% of the world’s wheat from vast and fertile farmlands in the Black Sea region known as the “breadbasket of the world.” But last week, <a href="#">Ukraine banned the export of wheat, oats and other staples</a> to avoid a “humanitarian crisis” among its people, according to a government statement.</p> <p>As the war and Ukraine’s ban on exporting wheat threatens the global supply, U.S. wheat farmers are also concerned about the increase in their production expenses. It’s still too early to know how the disruptions to the global wheat market will affect Washington’s wheat farmers.</p>



The demand that's sure to increase out of the situation in Ukraine will continue to contribute to higher prices for buyers overseas, said Glen Squires, CEO of the [Washington Grain Commission](#).

Prices vary depending on markets and type of grain, but in recent days the cost of soft white wheat, the major class of grain grown in Washington, was \$11.70 a bushel. Last year, it was around \$7.35 in the lower Columbia River District, Portland and Vancouver areas, Squires said.

Although it may seem like the price increase may be a good thing for U.S. farmers, including those in the Pacific Northwest, the rise in production costs, such as fertilizers, pesticides and mechanization, among other things, is cutting into profit, Carstensen said.

"We are price takers and cannot pass along any input cost increases," he said.

Even before last week's export ban, there were concerns over global food shortages and further increases in prices as Ukrainian farmers have no other option but to neglect their farms and flee in an attempt to stay alive or fight to remain sovereign, according to The Associated Press.

According to data from the Washington State Grain Commission, wheat is a staple food to more than 35% of the world's population and provides 20% of the world's nutritional needs.

Countries that rely on wheat exports from Ukraine could face shortages starting in July, increasing food insecurity and potentially throwing more people into poverty in countries that depend on the product, The AP reported.

Next year, people might turn to more affordable grains and wheat substitutes, Fortenbery said, which could potentially affect wheat prices, but it's too early to tell exactly how the conflict will affect the market.

Washington's winter wheat was already in the ground when the war broke out on Feb. 24, and the acreage for spring wheat is smaller, so there's not a lot of room for growers to increase production, Fortenbery said.

In 2020, Washington's wheat production almost hit a record high, he said. But drought caused 2021 to have the lowest production since 1964.

Fortenbery said there may be an increase in 2023 wheat production across the country if officials choose to respond to market demands.

But even if more were planted in the short-term or come 2023, it wouldn't be enough to offset what Ukraine provides to the world market, Fortenbery said.

And, it is hard to tell if it would make much difference to Washington farmers.

About 90% of the wheat produced in Washington is exported, much to markets in Japan and the Philippines, according to the Washington State Department of Agriculture. Russia and Ukraine export wheat to countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

The markets Ukraine serves aren't necessarily influenced by the quality of the wheat or grain as the U.S. overseas markets, said Stephen Van Vleet, regional extension specialist in agriculture and natural resources at Washington State University.

Farmers are used to dealing with fluctuating prices. Still, the current state of the markets is highly volatile, said Ben Barstow, a farmer west of Palouse.

"This whole situation is concerning," Barstow said. "It's just unpredictable."

	<p>The cost of energy, oil, gas and fertilizer, to name a few, has also increased for Barstow, adding to the long list of expenses.</p> <p>“It’s so bad I haven’t even looked,” he said. “I’m just gonna have to pay whatever it costs.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Cost of inflation hitting each month</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/inflation-prices-cost-food-gas-rent-households/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/inflation-prices-cost-food-gas-rent-households/</a>
GIST	<p>Spiraling inflation is costing the typical U.S. household an additional \$296 per month — and shows little sign of slowing anytime soon, according to a new analysis by Moody's Analytics.</p> <p>Supply-chain constraints and robust economic demand, combined with U.S. sanctions on Russian businesses, are driving broad increases in the price of food, energy and other items. The Consumer Price Index, a measure of changing prices over time of a basket of goods, rose <a href="#">7.9% in February from a year ago</a> — the fastest annual rate since the Reagan administration.</p> <p>"It's going to get worse before it gets better," the economic research firm said in a <a href="#">report</a>.</p> <p>A key driver of inflation is <a href="#">soaring gasoline prices</a>, which have steadily climbed during the economic recovery amid rising consumer demand and, more recently and steeply, <a href="#">Russia's attack on Ukraine</a>.</p> <p>Lingering bottlenecks in critical products, such as semiconductors and <a href="#">industrial metals</a>, also continue to hinder supplies and raise costs.</p> <p>"U.S. inflation is at its highest level in about four decades," Moody's said. "Much of the inflation has been caused by pandemic-generated supply constraints, although Russia's invasion of Ukraine is creating additional constraints that will push inflation higher and for longer than thought before the assault began."</p> <p>Consumers are spending less on the goods and services seeing the sharpest price increases, according to the report. These include rent, food, vehicles, furniture and household equipment.</p> <p>"The poster child for that are new and used cars," said Ryan Sweet, an author of the report. "Supply chain-related disruptions to chip manufacturing in Asia Pacific is limiting the amount of inventory for vehicles in the U.S. and driving prices through the roof."</p> <p>Grocery prices have also risen dramatically, a particular blow to Americans living on a budget. The <a href="#">biggest food price hikes</a> are for meat, with pork and beef up 14% to 20%, respectively, compared with a year ago.</p> <p>"What's going on in Europe has put pressure on food prices at restaurants and grocery stores, and we're seeing consumers' inflation expectations increase. It's attributed to the prices we're seeing at grocery stores and at the gas station," Sweet said.</p> <p>Data from Adobe shows that online prices are also elevated — an unprecedented shift as ecommerce has exploded over the last two decades and often driven down retail prices. The digital analytics company found that consumers have spent \$32 billion more for the same amount of goods during the pandemic.</p> <p>"We've never seen inflation online before. You would expect people to be getting more goods for money in any given year," Adobe analyst Taylor Schreiner told CBS MoneyWatch.</p> <p>"The fact that people are spending more to get the same goods is a really big change driven by supply-chain issues and labor challenges," he added. "It's new for consumers."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Belarus independent media crackdown</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/belarusian-journalists-handed-jail-terms-media-crackdown-83467344">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/belarusian-journalists-handed-jail-terms-media-crackdown-83467344</a>
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine -- Journalists of Belarus' oldest newspaper were handed prison terms Tuesday in the latest move in a relentless government crackdown on independent media.</p> <p>Nasha Niva's chief editor Yahor Martsinovich and journalist Andrey Skurko each were sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison on charges of dodging communal payments they have rejected as politically driven. Martsinovich and Skurko have remained in custody since their arrest in July.</p> <p>The newspaper was blocked in July and banned as extremist in November on the 115th anniversary of its founding. The ban has exposed anyone who would publish or repost Nasha Niva materials to prison terms of up to seven years.</p> <p>Most other Nasha Niva journalists have left the country and continued to publish the newspaper online, changing its domain to bypass the blocking.</p> <p>Nasha Niva extensively covered the massive anti-government protests that erupted after President Alexander Lukashenko was handed a sixth term after an August 2020 presidential vote that was denounced as rigged by the opposition and the West.</p> <p>Belarusian authorities responded with a sweeping crackdown that saw more than 35,000 people arrested and thousands beaten by police. Overall, 32 Belarusian journalists are in custody, serving their sentences or awaiting trial.</p> <p>Lukashenko has held on to power amid bruising Western sanctions relying on support from his main ally and sponsor Russia, which used the Belarusian territory to launch an invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.</p> <p>"We upheld the freedom of speech and independence of Belarus, but both have now become hollow," Martsinovich said in a speech at his trial. "The newspaper has survived two revolutions and two world wars during its history, and now it's witnessing another war into which Belarus was drawn. We are its victims."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 China military aid for Russia plausible?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/explainer-plausible-chinese-military-aid-russia-83451560">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/explainer-plausible-chinese-military-aid-russia-83451560</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- The U.S. says Russia has asked China to provide military assistance for its war in Ukraine, and that China has responded affirmatively. Both Moscow and Beijing have denied the allegation, with a Chinese spokesperson dismissing it as "disinformation."</p> <p>Still, the claims have generated conjecture over how far Beijing would be willing to go in backing its "most important strategic partner," as China's foreign minister recently described Russia.</p> <p><b>WHAT DID THE U.S. SAY?</b></p> <p>Following initial reports that Russia had asked China for military aid, unnamed U.S. officials said that Washington had determined that China had sent a signal to Russia: Beijing would be willing to provide both military support for the campaign in Ukraine and financial backing to help stave off the impact of severe sanctions imposed by the West.</p> <p>At a meeting in Rome on Monday, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan warned senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi against providing such support, even as the Kremlin denied requesting military equipment.</p>

The U.S. is wary of China's intentions because the government of President Xi Jinping has refused to criticize the Russian invasion, even as it seeks to distance itself from the Kremlin's war by calling for dialogue and reiterating its position that a nation's territory must be respected.

#### WHAT MIGHT CHINA OFFER?

If anything, smaller items such as bullets and meals are more likely than fighter jets and tanks, experts said.

China “probably wants to avoid high-profile or big-ticket arms sales to Russia in the midst of a conflict which would expose Beijing to international sanctions,” said Drew Thompson, a former U.S. Defense Department official currently at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore.

Beijing would be more willing to provide spare parts, consumables, ammunition, and dual-use items that don’t contravene sanctions and could fall below the threshold of international reprisals, Thompson said.

For example, Russian helicopters are likely using up their flares to counter portable short-range missiles like the Stinger. China could conceivably sell Russia some of its flares, if they are compatible with Russian systems, Thompson said. China might also share surveillance and intelligence, he said.

Given Washington’s warnings, any Chinese aid would likely involve “very basic stuff,” such as ration packs for soldiers, said Sam Roggeveen, director of the International Security Program at Australia’s Lowy Institute.

He added that Russia would find it virtually impossible to integrate Chinese armaments into its armed forces on such short notice.

#### WOULD CHINA DO IT?

While not impossible, both Chinese and non-Chinese experts say there are several factors working against it. For starters, it could look bad.

“China will be very careful trying its best to avoid its aid and other assistance being used on the battlefields of Ukraine,” said Shi Yinhong, a professor of international relations at Renmin University in Beijing.

He added that China “has no motive to provide any assistance to Russia’s operation in Ukraine.”

Roggeveen concurred that there is no “obvious upside” for China in aiding Moscow, adding that a weakened Russia could work to China’s strategic and economic advantage.

Chinese officials have also said throughout the crisis that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries should be respected — though critics say its refusal to criticize Russia's invasion is in fundamental contradiction to that position.

“Russia’s military operation in Ukraine has in nature become an invasion, and China will never provide arms to help a country attack another sovereign county and that is not in accordance with international law,” said Li Xin, director of the Institute of European and Asian Studies at Shanghai University of Political Science and Law.

China also does not want to see the conflict worsen or be dragged in as a co-belligerent, so any Chinese support “would be measured and carefully calibrated,” Thompson said.

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SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/protesters-blame-sri-lanka-leader-severe-economic-crisis-83469501">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/protesters-blame-sri-lanka-leader-severe-economic-crisis-83469501</a>
GIST	<p>COLOMBO, Sri Lanka -- Anti-government protests roiled Sri Lanka's capital on Tuesday amid demands that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa resign, as the country suffers its worst economic crisis within memory.</p> <p>Tens of thousands of people gathered outside of the president's office in Colombo, led by supporters of the opposition party of the United People's Force.</p> <p>Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa addressed the demonstration, declaring it marked the beginning of a campaign to oust the government.</p> <p>"You have been suffering now for two years. Can you suffer further?" he told the large crowd carrying signs and anti-government banners.</p> <p>Premadasa described the sitting government as "evil" and blamed it for many of the country's economic woes.</p> <p>Demonstrators accused the government of mismanaging the economy and creating a foreign exchange crisis that has led to shortages of essentials like fuel, cooking gas, milk powder and medicine.</p> <p>Sri Lanka is struggling to pay for imports as its foreign reserves are at an all-time low.</p> <p>Rajapaksa is scheduled to address the nation on Wednesday. He is expected to speak about the economic crisis and possible solutions.</p> <p>Fuel shortages have curbed transportation within the country, including of essential supplies, and have led to hours-long daily power cuts.</p> <p>In the face of the fiscal crisis, Sri Lanka's Central Bank floated the national currency last week, resulting in its devaluation by 36% and a further sharp rise in prices.</p> <p>Authorities have expanded banned imports to include some fruits and milk products, alongside the existing ban on imports of cars, floor tiles and other products, to staunch the outflow of foreign currency.</p> <p>Sri Lanka's fiscal crisis is partly driven by outstanding foreign debts of some \$7 billion.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Seattle crane collapse victims to get \$112M</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/victims-seattle-crane-collapse-receive-112-million/story?id=83455474">https://abcnews.go.com/US/victims-seattle-crane-collapse-receive-112-million/story?id=83455474</a>
GIST	<p>Three people who were injured and the families of two people killed after a crane collapsed on a Seattle construction site in 2019, will receive \$112 million in a settlement, David Beninger, a lawyer for one of the victims told ABC News Tuesday.</p> <p>The crane fell from the construction site which included a Google office building in the South Lake Union neighborhood in April 2019 as it was being dismantled, killing four people.</p> <p>Lawsuits filed by families of two of the victims killed in the collapse and three who were injured, were consolidated into one case in the King County Superior Court, involving multiple firms involved in the construction site where the crane collapsed.</p> <p>In the Monday verdict, a jury found four of the construction companies negligent, but only three of the companies' negligence resulted in the death of Sarah Wong and Alan Justad, and injury of Brittany Cadelina, Ali Edriss and Sally Beaven.</p>

While the jury found GLY Construction, the company that leased the crane, negligent, it was not found responsible for the deaths and injuries.

The other companies named in the lawsuit are Morrow Equipment, which owned and leased the crane to the construction project and provided expertise for the building and dismantling of the crane; Northwest Tower Crane Service, which was in charge of setting up and dismantling the crane; and Omega Morgan, a mobile crane subcontractor.

The jury attributed 45% of the negligence to Northwest Tower Crane, 30% to Omega Morgan and 25% to Morrow Equipment.

The jury awarded the victims more than \$150 million in damages, but Morrow Equipment Company did not participate in the trial as it is in discussions regarding other agreements with the victims, according to Beninger.

Wong's estate, her parents and sibling are to receive a combined \$54.15 million. Nineteen-year-old Wong, a student at Seattle Pacific University, was a passenger in a car when parts of the crane struck it causing her fatal injuries.

Justad's estate and his three daughters will receive a combined \$39.15 million. Seventy-one-year-old Justad was in his car when parts of the crane landed on top of the vehicle.

Cadelina and Edriss will each receive \$9.2 million and Beaven will receive \$975,000, according to Beninger and amounts awarded by the jury.

"Northwest Tower Crane Service respects the verdict of the jury and thanks them for their service in this trial. Northwest Tower Crane changed its practices immediately after this tragic accident and continues to strive to make safety its top priority," an attorney for Northwest Tower Crane Services said to ABC News in a statement, declining to comment any further.

Attorneys for the Wongs, Cadelina and Omega did not immediately respond to ABC News' request for comment.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Media reports: 3 journalists killed in Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/fox-news-journalist-injured-ukraine-day-journalist-killed/story?id=83442056">https://abcnews.go.com/International/fox-news-journalist-injured-ukraine-day-journalist-killed/story?id=83442056</a>
GIST	<p>Three journalists, including a filmmaker, a producer and a Fox News cameraperson, were killed covering the Russian invasion in Ukraine this week.</p> <p>Ukrainian producer and fixer Oleksandra "Sasha" Kuvshynova, 24, and Fox News cameraperson Pierre Zakrzewski, 55, were both killed in Gorenka, outside Kyiv, in a shelling on Monday, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).</p> <p>Kuvshynova was working with Fox News as a consultant, the network confirmed.</p> <p>"She was incredibly talented and spent weeks working directly with our entire team there, operating around the clock to make sure the world knew what was happening in her country," Suzanne Scott, CEO of Fox News Media, said in a statement Tuesday.</p> <p>Zakrzewski was working alongside Fox News State Department correspondent Benjamin Hall "when incoming fire hit their vehicle outside of Kyiv" on Monday, the network said Tuesday. Zakrzewski had covered stories in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria for Fox News.</p> <p>"Pierre Zakrzewski was an absolute legend at this network, and his loss is devastating," the network said.</p>



"The president of Fox, Jay Wallace, says that everyone always felt an extra sense of reassurance when they arrived on the scene and they saw that Pierre was there. He was a professional, he was a journalist and he was a friend," Fox News PR said Tuesday.

"I condemn the killings of Oleksandra Kuvshynova and Pierre Zakrzewski. Journalists have a critical role in providing information during a conflict and should never be targeted," UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay said on Tuesday. "I call for the respect of international humanitarian standards, to ensure that journalists and media workers are protected."

Hall was hospitalized, according to Scott, who asked Monday to "please keep Ben and his family in your prayers." Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby also confirmed he was injured.

Shaun Tandon, president of the State Department Correspondents' Association, said in a Monday statement, "We know Ben for his warmth, good humor and utmost professionalism. We wish Ben a quick recovery and call for utmost efforts to protect journalists who are providing an invaluable service through their coverage in Ukraine."

This incident follows the Sunday death of freelance journalist Brent Renaud, which was confirmed by the U.S. State Department. Renaud was in Ukraine to cover the global refugee crisis for a documentary with Sugar23, Time Studios and Day Zero Productions, according to Sugar23.

"As an award-winning filmmaker and journalist, Brent tackled the toughest stories around the world often alongside his brother Craig Renaud," Time editor-in-chief and CEO Edward Felsenthal and president and COO of Time and Time Studios Ian Orefice [said in a statement](#). "In recent weeks, Brent was in the region working on a TIME Studios project focused on the global refugee crisis. Our hearts are with all of Brent's loved ones."

Photojournalist Juan Arredondo said he was with Renaud when he was killed.

In a video from a hospital bed, Arredondo said, "We crossed the first bridge in Irpin; we were going to film other refugees leaving and we got to a car, somebody offered to take us to the other bridge, and we crossed a checkpoint and they started shooting at us. So, the driver turned around, and they kept shooting. It's two of us, my friend is Brent Renaud, and he's been shot and left behind."

"This kind of attack is totally unacceptable and is a violation of international law," Carlos Martínez de la Serna, program director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, [said in a statement](#) Monday. "Russian forces in Ukraine must stop all violence against journalists and other civilians at once."

"Two examples of the dangers in covering war," Kirby, of the Pentagon, said of Hall and Renaud during a Monday press briefing. "This is a war that didn't need to be fought, to be sure. But just as to be sure, there are journalists from around the world on the ground trying to discover the truth and to show that truth and to tell these important stories."

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## Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	03/16 CISA: fix MFA, patch promptly; Russia hack
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cisa-fix-mfa-patch-promptly-stop/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cisa-fix-mfa-patch-promptly-stop/</a>
GIST	The US authorities have issued a new alert warning of Russian state-backed malicious activity involving exploiting a well-known bug in Windows Print Spooler discovered last year.

The US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) explained that Russian actors had been spotted exploiting the PrintNightmare bug ([CVE-2021-34527](#)) back in May 2021, targeting an unnamed NGO.

This was part of an attack chain that began when they exploited a misconfigured account set to default multi-factor authentication (MFA) protocols, allowing them to enroll a new device for MFA and access the victim's network.

PrintNightmare then enabled the attackers to run arbitrary code with system privileges and subsequently access cloud and email accounts for document exfiltration.

[The alert lists](#) multiple mitigations that CISA urges all organizations to apply, including enforcing MFA and reviewing configuration policies to protect against "fail open" and re-enrollment scenarios.

It also asks organizations to make sure inactive accounts are disabled across Active Directory and MFA systems and that patches are prioritized for known exploited vulnerabilities.

"At CISA, we are great believers in MFA. It remains one of the most effective measures individuals and organizations can take to reduce their risk to malicious cyber activity. This advisory demonstrates the imperative that organizations configure MFA properly to maximize effectiveness," said CISA director [Jen Easterly](#).

"Now, more than ever, organizations must put their shields up to protect against cyber-intrusions, which means applying the mitigations in this advisory including enforcing MFA for all users without exception, patching known exploited vulnerabilities, and ensuring MFA is implemented securely."

The PrintNightmare zero-day was first revealed accidentally by Chinese researchers [in July 2021](#). It's a remote code execution vulnerability that exists when the Windows Print Spooler service improperly performs privileged file operations, enabling attackers to run arbitrary with system privileges.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Germany against using Kaspersky antivirus</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/german-government-advises-against-using-kaspersky-antivirus/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/german-government-advises-against-using-kaspersky-antivirus/</a>
GIST	<p>Germany's Federal Office for Information Security, BSI, is warning companies against using Kaspersky antivirus products due to threats made by Russia against the EU, NATO, and Germany.</p> <p>Kaspersky is a Moscow-based cybersecurity and antivirus provider founded in 1997, that has a long history of success, but also controversy over the company's possible <a href="#">relationship with the Russian government</a>.</p> <p>Kaspersky's founder and CEO, Eugene Kaspersky, recently expressed a wish for "compromise" regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which sparked outrage on Twitter, with many rejecting the firm's stance on the matter.</p> <p>Kaspersky is also believed to offer its cybersecurity protection services to <a href="#">Russian state IT infrastructure</a>, making it a concern that the company cannot stay completely neutral.</p> <p><b>BSI warns against using Kaspersky</b></p> <p>Today, the BSI is warning German companies to replace Kaspersky AV and any other products from the firm with alternative software from non-Russian vendors.</p> <p>As the <a href="#">BSI statement explains</a>, antivirus software typically has higher-level privileges on Windows systems, maintaining a permanent, encrypted, and non-verifiable connection to the vendor's servers for constant virus definition updates.</p>

Furthermore, as real-time protection from almost all antivirus vendors can upload suspicious files to remote servers for further analysis, there is concern that antivirus developers could use their software to exfiltrate sensitive files.

While Kaspersky is likely trustworthy and ethical, it still has to abide by Russian laws and regulations, including allowing state agents to access private firm databases.

BSI is taking this further by suggesting that Kaspersky could be forced into aiding the Russian intelligence forces in carrying out cyberattacks or conducting espionage.

*"The actions of military and/or intelligence forces in Russia and the threats made by Russia against the EU, NATO and the Federal Republic of Germany in the course of the current military conflict are associated with a considerable risk of a successful IT attack. A Russian IT manufacturer can carry out offensive operations itself, be forced to attack target systems against its will, or be spied on without its knowledge as a victim of a cyber operation, or be misused as a tool for attacks against its own customers."*  
BSI

To avoid panic moves like switching off protection without activating a replacement security product, BSI advises all organizations to prepare accordingly by first performing a complete assessment.

Also, whenever a switch to alternative security products takes place, loss of comfort, functionality, and even safety is expected, so a remediation plan to address all that must be developed.

This warning has already led to German organizations, such as [Germany's Eintracht sports club](#), to no longer use Kaspersky's services.

However, Kaspersky believes that BSI's warning to remove Kaspersky products is a political decision rather than a technical assessment of their products.

A Kaspersky spokesperson shared the following statement with BleepingComputer regarding BSI's warnings, which we have shared in full below:

*We believe this decision is not based on a technical assessment of Kaspersky products – that we continuously advocated for with the BSI and across Europe – but instead is being made on political grounds. We will continue to assure our partners and customers in the quality and integrity of our products, and we will be working with the BSI for clarification on its decision and for the means to address its and other regulators' concerns.*

*At Kaspersky, we believe that transparency and the continued implementation of concrete measures to demonstrate our enduring commitment to integrity and trustworthiness to our customers is paramount. Kaspersky is a private global cybersecurity company and, as a private company, does not have any ties to the Russian or any other government.*

*We believe that peaceful dialogue is the only possible instrument for resolving conflicts. War isn't good for anyone.*

*Our data processing infrastructure was relocated to Switzerland in 2018: since then, malicious and suspicious files voluntarily shared by users of Kaspersky products in Germany are processed in two data centers in Zurich that provide world-class facilities, in compliance with industry standards, to ensure the highest levels of security. Beyond our cyberthreat-related data processing facilities in Switzerland, statistics provided by users to Kaspersky can be processed on the Kaspersky Security Network's services located in various countries around the world, including Canada and Germany. The security and integrity of our data services and engineering practices have been confirmed by independent third-party assessments: through the SOC 2 Audit conducted by a 'Big Four' auditor, and through the ISO 27001 certification and recent re-certification by TÜV Austria.*

	<p><i>Kaspersky has set the industry benchmark for digital trust and transparency. Our customers can run a free technical and comprehensive review of our solutions, allowing them to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Review our secure software development documentation including threat analysis, secure review, and application security testing processes</i></li> <li><i>Review the source code of our leading solutions including Kaspersky Internet Security (KIS), our flagship consumer product; Kaspersky Endpoint Security (KES), our flagship enterprise product; and Kaspersky Security Center (KSC), a control console for our enterprise products</i></li> <li><i>Review all versions of our builds and AV-database updates, as well as the types of information which Kaspersky products send to our cloud-based Kaspersky Security Network (KSN)</i></li> <li><i>Rebuild the source code to make sure it corresponds to publicly available modules</i></li> <li><i>Review the results of an external audit of the company's engineering practices conducted by one of the 'Big Four' accounting firms;</i></li> <li><i>Review the Software Bill of Materials (SBOM) for Kaspersky Internet Security (KIS), Kaspersky Endpoint Security (KES), and Kaspersky Security Center (KSC)</i></li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Dozens of ransomware variants very active</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/dozens-of-ransomware-variants-used-in-722-attacks-over-3-months/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/dozens-of-ransomware-variants-used-in-722-attacks-over-3-months/</a>
GIST	<p>The ransomware space was very active in the last quarter of 2021, with threat analysts observing 722 distinct attacks deploying 34 different variants.</p> <p>This massive amount of activity creates problems for the defenders, making it harder to keep up with individual group tactics, indicators of compromise, and detection opportunities.</p> <p>Compared to Q3 2021, the last quarter had 18% higher attack volume, while the comparison to Q2 2021 results in a difference of 22%, so there's a trend of increasing attack numbers.</p> <p><b>Actors and targets</b></p> <p>The most prevalent ransomware groups in Q4 2021, according to a report by Intel 471, were LockBit 2.0 (29.7%), Conti (19%), PYSA (10.5%), and Hive (10.1%).</p> <p>Compared to the preceding quarter, only PYSA had a noticeable rise in activity, which was also noted in <a href="#">a report by the NCC Group</a> that examined November 2021 data.</p> <p>The most targeted region was North America, accounting for almost half of all attacks by the ransomware operations mentioned above. Europe followed with roughly 30%, leaving only 20% to the rest of the world.</p> <p>The stats are rather balanced for targeted industries, and only the Consumer and Industrial products sector stands out, accounting for one out of four attacks. Manufacturing, professional services, and real estate also had substantial shares.</p> <p><b>Shifting focus</b></p> <p>When looking at this from the perspective of trends, compared to Q3 2021 data, the manufacturing sector dropped while consumer and industrial products rose. In addition, life sciences and health care also had a significant rise.</p> <p>This shift could be due to the seasonal interest for shopping during Christmas and Black Friday/Cyber Monday, which makes associated targets more lucrative.</p> <p>Healthcare also obtains a more critical role as we move towards the end of the year, possibly due to the winter in the northern hemisphere bringing higher viral transmission rates.</p>

	<p>Ransomware groups aim to disrupt the operations of firms at the worst possible time, to increase the chances of having a quick resolution in their negotiation for the payment of the demanded ransom.</p> <p>For example, the FBI recently warned that ransomware gangs commonly <a href="#">target companies during mergers and acquisitions</a> to further apply pressure during negotiations.</p> <p>However, in many cases, the targeted companies are purely opportunistic in nature, where ransomware gangs simply attack whoever they can gain access to rather than based on any vertical or season.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Massive phishing to steal credentials</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/massive-phishing-campaign-uses-500-plus-domains-to-steal-credentials/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/massive-phishing-campaign-uses-500-plus-domains-to-steal-credentials/</a>
GIST	<p>Large-scale phishing activity using hundreds of domains to steal credentials for Naver, a Google-like online platform in South Korea, shows infrastructure overlaps linked to the TrickBot botnet.</p> <p>The resources used for this attack show the sheer size of the cybercriminal effort to collect login data to be used in various attacks.</p> <p>Similar to Google, Naver provides a diverse set of services that range from web search to email, news, and the <a href="#">NAVER Knowledge iN</a> online Q&amp;A platform.</p> <p><b>Massive infrastructure</b></p> <p>Besides access to normal user accounts, Naver credentials can also open the door to enterprise environments, as a result of password reuse.</p> <p>Security researchers at cyber intelligence company Prevaillon earlier this year identified a massive phishing operation focused on collecting credentials of Naver users.</p> <p>They started the investigation from one domain name - mailmangecorp[.]us - shared by <a href="#">Joe Slowik</a>, which opened the door to a “vast network of targeted phishing infrastructure designed to harvest valid login credentials for Naver.”</p> <p>“While investigating the hosting infrastructure being used to serve the Naver-themed phishing pages, PACT analysts identified overlaps with the WIZARD SPIDER [a.k.a. TrickBot] infrastructure,” Prevaillon says in a report today.</p> <p>The TrickBot operation is believed to have <a href="#">changed management</a> recently, with its old partner, the Conti ransomware syndicate, moving to its helm.</p> <p>The researchers linked 542 unique domains to the operation, 532 of them being used for Naver-themed phishing.</p> <p>They noticed that the operator would use an email address to register a set of domain names that resolved to a single IP address.</p> <p>The threat actor relied on multiple addresses to create registrant personas for the Naver campaign. Some of the domains are registered as recently as February, while the oldest ones date from August 2021.</p> <p>Prevaillon researchers discovered that the domains resolving to the IP address in the image above were part of a redirect scheme (HTTP/302) that took potential victims to fake login pages for the Naver platform hosted on Hostinger.</p>

From the initial email address, Prevailion was able to find another cluster of 58 phishing domains resolving to 23.81.246[.]131, an IP address that proved critical in establishing the initial connection between Naver credential phishing and the infrastructure associated with TrickBot.

According to the researchers, a couple of Cobalt Strike beacon samples on Virus Total were associated with 23.81.246[.]131 as part of a campaign that exploited [CVE-2021-40444](#) to deliver Conti ransomware, a common payload for TrickBot.

In the [report](#) today, Prevailion provides additional indicators connecting the Naver phishing domains to TrickBot infrastructure revealed in public research from [RiskIQ](#) and Microsoft.

The researchers say that their findings are suggesting that the Naver phishing activity is continuing as the infrastructure is still in use and numerous domains have been registered this month for this purpose.

Prevailion notes that “this infrastructure appears to support separate, discrete campaigns” and while the overlaps with TrickBot infrastructure exist, they are limited to hosting and DNS resolutions.

The company also underlines that “the Naver-themed phishing activity that was initially discovered does not appear to be the work of a ransomware group directly.”

However, these file-encrypting attacks are often preceded by phishing or credential-stealing campaigns run by affiliates or partners seeking access to networks of valuable targets.

One theory that Prevailion believes explains their findings is that cybercriminals are relying on an “infrastructure-as-a-service” type of offering for their operations.

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HEADLINE	03/15 Russia IT crisis: 2mo. data storage left
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/russia-faces-it-crisis-with-just-two-months-of-data-storage-left/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/russia-faces-it-crisis-with-just-two-months-of-data-storage-left/</a>
GIST	<p>Russia faces a critical IT storage crisis after Western cloud providers pulled out of the country, leaving Russia with only two more months before they run out of data storage.</p> <p>The Russian government is exploring various solutions to resolve this IT storage problem, ranging from leasing all available domestic data storage to seizing IT resources left behind by businesses that pulled out of the country.</p> <p>These solutions were proposed during a meeting held at the Ministry of Digital Transformation, attended by representatives of Sberbank, MTS, Oxygen, Rostelecom, Atom-Data, Croc, and Yandex.</p> <p>According to the Russian news outlet <a href="#">Kommersant</a>, which claims to have sources confirming this proposal, the parties estimated they have roughly two months left before running out of available storage space.</p> <p>Due to imposed sanctions, all Russian firms were forced to turn to <a href="#">domestic cloud storage</a> service providers after Western cloud storage services cut business ties with the country.</p> <p>For example, the locally-sourced storage capacity needs of Russian mobile carrier MegaFon increased fivefold, MTS tenfold, and VK had to seek 20% more storage resources in just a week.</p> <p>This has created an insurmountable practical problem as there are not enough data centers in Russia to accommodate the needs of local operators; hence, a national solution for the Russian storage crisis is needed.</p>



Kommersant further explains that the situation coincides with public Russian agencies' storage needs growing exponentially due to "smart city" projects involving extensive video surveillance and facial recognition systems.

### Steps to a solution

Last week, the Ministry of Digital Development [amended the Yarovaya Law](#) (2016) to suspend a yearly requirement for telecom operators to increase storage capacity allocations by 15% for anti-terrorist surveillance purposes.

Another move that could free up space would be to demand ISPs abandon media streaming services and other online entertainment platforms that eat up precious resources.

Thirdly, there's the option of buying out all available storage from domestic data processing centers. However, this will likely lead to further problems for entertainment providers who need additional storage to add services and content.

Russia is also considering seizing IT servers and storage left behind by companies who pulled out of Russia and integrating them into public infrastructure.

According to local media, the ministry is currently analyzing how much resources would be made available if the government enacted such policies. A fast-track procedure will then be developed if they are enough to support critical state operations.

The final option would be to tap into Chinese cloud service providers and IT system sellers, but this is currently complicated because China has not yet decided how much it's willing to help Russia and on which sectors.

Huawei has reportedly suspended its equipment sales to Russia until March 26, 2022. However, being itself sanctioned by the U.S. and barred from 5G roll-outs in EU countries, the Chinese tech firm may grasp the [business opportunity](#) to fill the void left by exiting western competitors.

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HEADLINE	03/15 FBI: MFA flaw exploited by state hackers
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-warns-of-mfa-flaw-used-by-state-hackers-for-lateral-movement/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-warns-of-mfa-flaw-used-by-state-hackers-for-lateral-movement/</a>
GIST	<p>The FBI says Russian state-backed hackers gained access to a non-governmental organization (NGO) cloud after enrolling their own device in the organization's Duo MFA following the exploitation of misconfigured default multifactor authentication (MFA) protocols.</p> <p>To breach the network, they used credentials compromised in a brute-force password guessing attack to access an un-enrolled and inactive account, not yet disabled in the organization's Active Directory.</p> <p>"As Duo's default configuration settings allow for the re-enrollment of a new device for dormant accounts, the actors were able to enroll a new device for this account, complete the authentication requirements, and obtain access to the victim network," the federal agencies explained.</p> <p>"The victim account had been un-enrolled from Duo due to a long period of inactivity but was not disabled in the Active Directory."</p> <p>The next step was to disable the MFA service by redirecting all Duo MFA calls to localhost instead of the Duo server after modifying a domain controller file.</p> <p>This allowed them to authenticate to the NGO's virtual private network (VPN) as non-administrator users, connect to Windows domain controllers via Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP), and obtain credentials for other domain accounts.</p>

With the help of these compromised accounts and without MFA enforced, the Russian-backed threat actors could move laterally and gain access to the cloud storage and email accounts and exfiltrate data.

FBI and CISA urged all organizations today in a joint cybersecurity advisory to apply the following mitigation measures:

- Enforce MFA and review configuration policies to protect against "fail open" and re-enrollment scenarios.
- Ensure inactive accounts are disabled uniformly across the Active Directory and MFA systems.
- Patch all systems. Prioritize patching for [known exploited vulnerabilities](#).

The two federal agencies shared additional information on the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), indicators of compromise (IOCs), and recommendations to protect against this malicious activity [in the joint advisory](#).

Previous joint advisories also warned of Russian state hackers targeting and compromising [US defense contractors](#) supporting the US Army, US Air Force, US Navy, US Space Force, and DoD and Intelligence programs.

Russian hacking groups, including [APT29](#), [APT28](#), and the [Sandworm Team](#), have also targeted organizations from [US critical infrastructure sectors](#).

In July 2021, the US government also [announced a reward of up to \\$10 million](#) for information on malicious activities coordinated by state hackers targeting critical infrastructure networks.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/14 Mobile threats skyrocket</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/endpoint/mobile-threats-skyrocket">https://www.darkreading.com/endpoint/mobile-threats-skyrocket</a>
GIST	<p>The volume of mobile threats is increasing and attackers are growing more sophisticated, with almost a third of zero-day attacks now targeting mobile devices, new data shows.</p> <p>In its annual mobile threats report published this week, cybersecurity firm Zimperium says data from its services shows that nearly a quarter of mobile devices encountered malware last year, while 13% had their data intercepted by a machine-in-the-middle attack and 12% were directed to a malicious website. The rising cyber-risk comes as the attack surface area of mobile applications has grown, with more than 900 Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures (CVEs) reported in 2021 that directly affect Apple iOS or Google Android. In addition, risks have risen from the third-party components used by developers, and a variety of misconfigurations have undermined the security of the cloud services underpinning mobile applications.</p> <p>The data suggests that adversaries are finding ways to exploit the traditionally strong software ecosystems surrounding mobile devices, says Richard Melick, director of threat reporting at Zimperium.</p> <p>"There was a pivotal change in the landscape as mobile devices are being increasingly targeted by attackers," he says. "These mobile devices are critical to our everyday lives, and they are critical work tools, [so] organizations have to approach the mobile device with the same security in mind as traditional endpoints."</p> <p>The mobile landscape has changed over the past two years, as the coronavirus pandemic forced employees to work from home, often using their own devices. Two-thirds of organizations currently have an active bring-your-own-device (BYOD) policy for workers, with another 11% looking to add the option in the next year, <a href="#">according to Zimperium's report</a>. Before the pandemic, only 40% had a BYOD policy in place.</p> <p>In addition, more employees say they consider their mobile devices to be a necessary tool to accomplish their work. For that, more than three-quarters of technology professionals rely on at least four applications on their mobile devices, the report states.</p>

"Mobile and traditional devices are converging, and the mobile versions are increasingly replacing their traditional counterparts, capable of accessing and processing high amounts of data far from the confines of an office," says Esteban Pellegrino, chief scientist at Zimperium, in an essay in the report. "With each new application's advancement in technology, there are unknown risks and threats to overcome."

About one in four Zimperium users — 22% in North America — "encountered" malware in 2021. The term, which is typically not well defined in industry reports, refers to clicking on a malicious link or opening a malicious attachment. Someone would have to engage with the link or attachment, Zimperium's Melick says.

Not only is malware more likely to be encountered, but the malicious programs have more tricks, he says. "We are seeing malware that is targeting multiple services; we are seeing malware that forces a factory reset of the device," Melick says. "The complicated nature of traditional malware is spilling over into the mobile space."

### **Also: Phishing**

Phishing attacks also took off during the coronavirus pandemic, with 61% of survey respondents who said they are seeing a spike in phishing attacks. In addition, attackers are tailoring phishing sites for mobile browsers and to take advantage of the limited screen real estate on the typical device.

"When phishing sites are adapted to the mobile device — because the user cannot always see the URL or some of the other signals of fraud — mistakes are easier to make on these small screens, so it is much more likely that they will click on the wrong link," Melick says.

Over the past decade, attacks on mobile users have increased, with attackers trying to adapt to the ubiquity of the devices. However, while encounters have increased, that does not mean that successful attacks have taken off. In addition, Zimperium's focus on the 466% increase in exploited zero-day vulnerabilities seen by mobile devices in 2021, compared with the prior year, speaks less to an increase in threats and likely more to an increase in research and bug bounties.

The data comes from Google's Project Zero, which [documented three vulnerabilities](#) that impacted iOS, Android, or the WebKit Web browser engine in 2019 and 2020. In 2021, however, there were four iOS, six Android, and seven WebKit vulnerabilities reportedly exploited. The WebKit browser engine is used by Apple — and some Linux — products.

Between phishing sites and more zero-day exploits, the data suggests that attackers have more options for compromising devices.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Leaked Samsung source code: secret keys</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.securityweek.com/thousands-secret-keys-found-leaked-samsung-source-code?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.securityweek.com/thousands-secret-keys-found-leaked-samsung-source-code?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>An analysis of the recently leaked Samsung source code revealed that thousands of secret keys have been exposed, including many that could be highly useful to malicious actors.</p> <p>The analysis was conducted by <a href="#">GitGuardian</a>, a company that specializes in Git security scanning and secrets detection. The firm's researchers looked at the source code leaked recently by a cybercrime group calling itself Lapsus\$.</p> <p>The hackers claim to have breached several major companies in the past weeks, including <a href="#">NVIDIA</a>, Samsung, <a href="#">Ubisoft</a> and <a href="#">Vodafone</a>. In many cases they appear to have obtained source code belonging to the victims, some of which has been made public.</p>

In the case of Samsung, the cybercriminals claim to have stolen 190 Gb of data and the tech giant has confirmed that the compromised information included source code related to Galaxy devices.

GitGuardian's [analysis of the leaked Samsung source code](#) led to the discovery of more than 6,600 secret keys, including private keys, usernames and passwords, AWS keys, Google keys, and GitHub keys.

The firm's researchers have yet to determine how many of the exposed keys are valid. However, their analysis showed that 90% are likely associated with internal systems and "can be more challenging for an attacker to use." On the other hand, the remaining keys — roughly 600 of them — can grant attackers access to a wide range of systems and services.

"Of the more than 6,600 keys found in Samsung source code roughly 90% are for Samsung's internal services and infrastructure, whilst the other 10%, critically, could grant access to Samsung's external services or tools such as AWS, GitHub, artifactory and Google," explained Mackenzie Jackson, developer advocate at GitGuardian.

Casey Bisson, head of product and developer relations at code security firm BluBracket, warned that the exposure of certain keys could lead to the TrustZone environment on Samsung devices getting compromised.

Researchers have yet to determine whether the exposed keys compromise the TrustZone, which stores sensitive data — such as biometrics and some passwords — and creates a security barrier for Android malware attacks.

"If the leaked data allows malware to access the TrustZone environment, it could make all data stored there vulnerable. If Samsung has lost control of the signing keys, it could make it impossible for Samsung to securely update phones to prevent attacks on the TrustZone environment," Bisson told *SecurityWeek*. "Compromised keys would make this a more significant attack than Nvidia, given the number of devices, their connection to consumers, and amount of very sensitive data that phones have."

A few months ago, GitGuardian also analyzed the source code leaked from Amazon-owned live streaming service Twitch, from which [hackers obtained](#) and made public roughly 6,000 internal Git repositories.

GitGuardian discovered nearly 6,600 secrets inside those repositories, including AWS keys, Twilio keys, Google API keys, database connection strings, and GitHub OAuth keys, among others.

A [study](#) conducted recently by the company showed that public GitHub repositories exposed more than six million secrets in 2021 — with 3 out of every 1,000 commits exposing at least one secret.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Malicious web application requests spike</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2022/03/15/malicious-web-application-requests/?web_view=true">https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2022/03/15/malicious-web-application-requests/?web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>Radware released report findings which underscore 2021 as the year of the web application <a href="#">attack</a>. Between 2020 and 2021, the number of malicious web application requests climbed 88%, more than double the year-over-year growth rate in distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, which were up 37% over 2020.</p> <p>The unprecedented increase in web application attacks did not, however, prevent DDoS from making a name for itself in 2021. The report details how last year saw multiple record-breaking <a href="#">DDoS attacks</a> and ransom denial-of-service (RDoS) earn its place in the threat landscape. At the same time that big attacks were making headlines, the volume of micro floods, attacks which often go undetected, rose nearly 80% compared to 2020.</p>

“The statistics tell a story about bad actors. They are getting smarter, more organized, and more targeted in pursuing their objectives — whether that be for money, fame, or a political cause,” said [Pascal Geenens](#), director of threat intelligence for [Radware](#).

“In addition, cybercriminals are shifting their attack patterns — from leveraging larger attack vectors to combining multiple vectors in more complex-to-mitigate campaigns. Ransomware operators and their affiliates, which now include DDoS-for-hire actors, are working with a whole new level of professionalism and discipline — something that we have not seen before.”

The report reviews the most important cybersecurity events in 2021 and provides detailed insights into DDoS and web application attack developments as well as unsolicited network scanning trends.

### Key takeaways

- **Cloud-scale DDoS attacks are in the forecast:** As more businesses migrate critical resources and applications to the public cloud, attackers are adapting their tactics and techniques to match the scale of public cloud providers. While enterprises should not be immediately alarmed by reports of huge attacks, they do need to be aware that DDoS attacks are a part of their threat landscape, irrespective of their geography or industry. Companies hosting services in the public cloud need to be prepared for cloud-scale attacks.
- **Ransom DoS (RDoS) gangs take charge:** In 2020, there was an uptick in DDoS attacks against organizations that did not pay a ransom demand on time. In 2021, RDoS confirmed its pervasive presence in the DDoS threat landscape with several campaigns. This included attacks targeting VoIP providers worldwide, which sparked concern for critical infrastructure.
- **Ransomware operators turn to triple extortion:** In 2021, more sophisticated and better organized operators advanced their [tactics](#), adding more extortion capabilities to their arsenal. To bring reluctant victims back to the negotiating table, they launched triple extortion campaigns by combining not only cryptolocking and data leaks, but also DDoS attacks. As a result, the flourishing underground economy supported by ransomware operators is seeing a new demand for DDoS-for-hire services.
- **Micro floods make a big showing:** While the number of large attack vectors (above 10Gbps) declined 5% between 2020 and 2021, micro floods (less than 1Gbps) and application-level attacks rose nearly 80% higher. By shrewdly combining a large number of micro floods over longer periods of time, attackers put organizations at greater risk of having to constantly increase infrastructure resources, such as bandwidth, and network and server processing, until the service can become cost prohibitive.

### DDoS attacks

In 2021, the number of malicious DDoS events increased by 37% per customer compared to 2020. Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA) and the Americas each accounted for 40% of the attack volume in 2021, while the Asia Pacific region accounted for 20%.

Average 2021 DDoS attack volumes per customer grew by 26% in 2021 compared to 2020.

The top attacked [industries](#) in 2021 were gaming and retail, each accounting for 22% of the attack volume on a normalized basis. These two industries were followed by the government (13%), healthcare (12%), technology (9%), and finance (6%).

### Web application attacks

The number of malicious [web application](#) requests grew 88% from 2020 to 2021. Broken access control and injection attacks represented more than 75% of web application attacks.

The most attacked industries in 2021 were banking and finance, along with SaaS providers, together accounting for more than 28% of web application attacks. Retail and high-tech industries ranked third and fourth, each with almost 12% of the web security events, followed by manufacturing (9%), government (6%), carriers (6%), and transportation (5%).

HEADLINE	03/15 Anonymous cripples Russia govt. agencies
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hackread.com/ddos-attacks-anonymous-cripple-russia-fsb-websites/?web_view=true">https://www.hackread.com/ddos-attacks-anonymous-cripple-russia-fsb-websites/?web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p><a href="#">Anonymous</a> hacktivists collective are claiming to have targeted top Russian government websites in a series of DDoS attacks. As a result, the official website of the Federal Security Service (aka FSB, the principal security agency of Russia), Stock Exchange, Analytical Center for the Government of the Russian Federation, and Ministry of Sport of the Russian Federation have been forced to go offline.</p> <p>For your information, in a DDoS attack (distributed denial-of-service attack), a website or service is bombarded with a high volume of internet traffic until it stops functioning and eventually goes offline. The full list of targeted institutions along with their domain addresses are as follow:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. FSB – Fsb.gov.ru</li> <li>2. Russian Stock Exchange – Moex.com</li> <li>3. Moscow International Portal – Moscow.ru</li> <li>4. Ministry of Sport of the Russian Federation – Minsport.gov.ru</li> <li>5. Analytical Center for the Government of the Russian – Ac.gov.ru</li> </ol> <p>The cyberattack, which was part of Anonymous’ ongoing operation called OpRussia, took place around 12:12 PM (GMT), March 15th, 2022. However, the severity of the attack can be quantified by the fact that almost seven hours have passed since the attack took place, yet all targeted websites were still unreachable and offline for visitors.</p> <p>On Twitter, <a href="#">@YourAnonNews</a>, one of the largest social media representatives of the Anonymous movement shared several screenshots showing targeted domains and their current service status.</p> <p>At the time of writing all targeted websites were offline.</p> <p><b>Anonymous siding with Ukraine</b></p> <p>As you may already know Russia has come under the radar of <a href="#">hacktivists</a>, particularly the Anonymous collective, after the country invaded Ukrainian territories on February 24th, 2022. Since then, Russian IT infrastructure is being targeted every other day including government websites, <a href="#">State-run TV channels</a>, <a href="#">online video streaming platforms</a>, etc.</p> <p>However, the group’s most significant attack took place last week when one of its affiliates hacked over 400 surveillance cameras in Russia. The hacktivists then defaced the compromised cameras with messages against President Putin and in support of Ukraine.</p> <p><a href="#">The second attack</a>, which is ongoing, is being set up by Squad303, a newly formed digital army comprising Anonymous-associated programmers. In the first stage of the attack, the group sent out 7 million text messages to random Russian citizens across the country urging them to protest against the Russian attack on Ukraine.</p> <p>Details of both attacks are <a href="#">available here</a>.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/15 Lapsus\$ hacking group chaotic start
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/lapsus-hacking-group-extortion-nvidia-samsung/">https://www.wired.com/story/lapsus-hacking-group-extortion-nvidia-samsung/</a>
GIST	<p><b>RANSOMWARE GANGS HAVE</b> <a href="#">become well-oiled moneymaking machines</a> in their quest for criminal profit. But since December, a seemingly new group called Lapsus\$ has added chaotic energy to the field, cavorting about with a strong social media presence on <a href="#">Telegram</a>, a string of high-profile victims—including Samsung, Nvidia, and Ubisoft—calamitous leaks, and dramatic accusations that add up to a reckless escalation in <a href="#">an already unlawful industry</a>.</p> <p>What makes Lapsus\$ noteworthy, too, is that the group isn't really a ransomware gang. Instead of exfiltrating data, encrypting target systems, and then <a href="#">threatening to leak the stolen information</a> unless the victim pays up, Lapsus\$ seems to exclusively focus on the data theft and extortion. The group gains access</p>



to victims through phishing attacks, then steals the most sensitive data it can find without deploying data-encrypting malware.

“It’s all been quite erratic and unusual,” says Brett Callow, a threat analyst at the antivirus company Emsisoft. “My sense is that they are a talented but inexperienced operation. Whether they will seek to expand and bring on affiliates or keep it small and lean remains to be seen.”

Lapsus\$ emerged just a few months ago, at first focused almost exclusively on Portuguese-language targets. In December and January, the group hacked and attempted to extort Brazil’s health ministry, the Portuguese media giant Impresa, the South American telecoms Claro and Embratel, and Brazilian car rental company Localiza, among others. In some cases, Lapsus\$ also mounted denial-of-service attacks against victims, making their sites and services unavailable for a period of time.

Even in those early campaigns, Lapsus\$ got creative; it set Localiza’s website to redirect to an adult media site for a couple of hours until the company could revert it.

As the attackers have ramped up and gained confidence, they’ve expanded their reach. In recent weeks, the group has hit Argentine ecommerce platforms MercadoLibre and MercadoPago, claims to have breached the British telecom Vodafone, and has begun leaking sensitive and valuable source code from Samsung and Nvidia.

“Remember: The only goal is money, our reasons are not political,” Lapsus\$ wrote in its Telegram channel in early December. And when the group announced its Nvidia breach on Telegram at the end of February, it added, “Please note: We are not state sponsored and we are not in politics AT ALL.”

Researchers say, though, that the truth about the gang’s intentions are more murky. Unlike many of the most [prolific ransomware groups](#), Lapsus\$ seems to be more of a loose collective than a disciplined, corporatized operation. “At this point it’s difficult to say with certainty what the group’s motivations are,” says Xue Yin Peh, a senior cyber-threat intelligence analyst at the security firm Digital Shadows. “There are no indications yet that the group uses ransomware to extort victims, so we can’t confirm that they’re financially motivated.”

Lapsus\$ breached Nvidia in mid-February, stealing 1 terabyte of data, including a significant amount of sensitive information about the designs of Nvidia graphics cards, source code for an Nvidia AI rendering system called DLSS, and the usernames and passwords of more than 71,000 Nvidia employees. The group threatened to release more and more data if Nvidia didn’t meet a series of unusual demands. At first the gang told the chipmaker to remove an anti-crypto-mining feature called Lite Hash Rate from its GPUs. Then Lapsus\$ demanded that the company release certain drivers for its chips.

“The focus on cryptocurrency mining suggests that the group may ultimately be financially driven, however they are certainly taking a different approach than other groups in soliciting financial rewards,” Digital Shadows’ Peh says.

In a tumultuous turn, Lapsus\$ also accused Nvidia of “hacking back”—lashing out against the group in retaliation for the attacks. A source close to the Nvidia incident disputed the claims, though, telling WIRED that the company did not hack back or deploy malware against Lapsus\$.

“It’s difficult to say. The only source we’ve had for it is the ransomware group themselves,” says independent security researcher Bill Demirkapi of the claims. “The explanation they gave for how Nvidia hacked back does make sense, but I always take such statements with a grain of salt, because Lapsus\$ has an incentive to make Nvidia look as bad as possible.”

Nvidia said in a statement that it learned about the breach on February 23 and quickly “further hardened our network, engaged cybersecurity incident response experts, and notified law enforcement.” The company acknowledged that the attackers stole employee authentication credentials and some proprietary data.

In a blithe, even rash move, Lapsus\$ also included two sensitive Nvidia code-signing certificates in its leaks. Other attackers quickly abused them to make their malware look more authentic and trustworthy in certain scenarios.

“This group operates on street cred and clout,” says Charles Carmakal, senior vice president and chief technical officer of the cybersecurity firm Mandiant. “They’re bragging to their friends, and if they get money, they’ll take it, but money doesn’t seem to be the sole or even primary driver. So a victim company that wants to negotiate with them and may think about paying them likely won’t get the outcome they’re hoping for.”

That thirst for notoriety makes Lapsus\$ particularly reckless and disruptive. While they don’t encrypt systems, Lapsus\$ has deleted files and virtual machines, and generally caused “a whole lot of chaos,” as Carmakal puts it.

Just a few days after it began leaking Nvidia data, Lapsus\$ also announced that it had stolen 190 gigabytes of data from Samsung, including boot-loader source code and algorithms for the Galaxy smartphone line’s biometric authentication system. Samsung confirmed last week that it suffered a breach.

A few days later, Ubisoft joined the fray. “Last week, Ubisoft experienced a cyber security incident that caused temporary disruption to some of our games, systems, and services,” the company wrote in a statement on Thursday. “As a precautionary measure we initiated a company-wide password reset ... There is no evidence any player personal information was accessed or exposed as a by-product of this incident.”

Specific details about the group remain scarce for now. Researchers suspect that Lapsus\$ is based in South America, potentially in Brazil, and say it may have a few members in Europe as well, perhaps in Portugal. Lapsus\$ doesn’t have a homepage on the dark web for posting samples of leaked data and negotiating with victims. Instead, in an unorthodox move for ransomware groups, the gang uses Telegram for most of its public-facing operations.

“One unusual tendency of Lapsus\$ is their use of Telegram to broadcast victims’ identities,” Digital Shadows’ Peh says. “Abusing a legitimate tool like Telegram ensures Lapsus\$’s data leak channel will see minimum disruption, and that their victims’ identities can be exposed to anyone with an internet connection.”

One of Lapsus\$’s trademark antics is to run polls on its Telegram channel where onlookers can vote for whose data the gang should publish next.

“It’s very reminiscent of the Lulzsec folks and even Anonymous back in the day,” Mandiant’s Carmakal says of the two hacktivist collectives that rose to prominence in the early 2010s. “Those folks had political motivations, or pretended to, but were also doing it for the fame and glory, and Lulzsec in particular was more overt about doing it for fun. With Lapsus\$ it’s a very dangerous thing for people to do for fun, and they will be arrested at some point in time.”

In the meantime, though, the question for Big Tech is, who will be in Lapsus\$’s crosshairs next? It seems that no target is too big or influential to be out of reach—and that the demands may be just as hard to predict.

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HEADLINE	03/16 World’s most dangerous ransomware gang
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/conti-leaks-ransomware-work-life/">https://www.wired.com/story/conti-leaks-ransomware-work-life/</a>
GIST	<b>THE CONTI RANSOMWARE</b> gang was on top of the world. The sprawling network of cybercriminals extorted <a href="#">\$180 million from its victims last year</a> , eclipsing the earnings of all other ransomware gangs. Then it backed Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. And it all started falling apart.

Conti's implosion started with a single post on the group's website, usually reserved for posting the names of its victims. Hours after Russian troops crossed Ukrainian borders on February 24, Conti [offered](#) its "full support" to the Russian government and threatened to hack critical infrastructure belonging to anyone who dared to launch cyberattacks against Russia.

But while many Conti members live in Russia, its scope is international. The war has divided the group; privately, some had railed [against Putin's invasion](#). And while Conti's ringleaders scrambled to retract their statement, it was too late. The damage had been done. Especially because the dozens of people with access to Conti's files and internal chat systems included a Ukrainian cybersecurity researcher who had infiltrated the group. They proceeded to rip Conti wide open.

On February 28, a newly created Twitter account called @ContiLeaks released more than [60,000 chat messages](#) sent among members of the gang, its source code, and scores of internal Conti documents. The scope and scale of the leak is unprecedented; never before have the daily inner workings of a ransomware group been laid so bare. "Glory to Ukraine," @ContiLeaks tweeted.

The leaked messages, reviewed in depth by WIRED, provide an unrivaled view into Conti's operations and expose the ruthless nature of one of the world's most successful [ransomware gangs](#). Among their revelations are the group's sophisticated businesslike hierarchy, its members' personalities, how it dodges law enforcement, and details of its ransomware negotiations.

"We see the gang progressing. We see the gang living. We see the gang committing crimes and changing over the course of several years," says Alex Holden, whose company [Hold Security](#) has tracked Conti members for most of the last decade. Holden, who was born in Ukraine but lives in America, says he knows the cybersecurity researcher who leaked the documents but says they are staying anonymous for safety reasons.

The Conti ransomware gang runs like any number of businesses around the world. It has multiple departments, from HR and administrators to coders and researchers. It has policies on how its hackers should process their code, and shares best practices to keep the group's members hidden from law enforcement.

At the top of the business is Stern, who also goes by Demon and acts as the CEO—Conti members call Stern the "big boss." All Conti members have pseudonymous usernames, which can change. Stern regularly chases people on their work and wants to account for their time. "Hello, how are you doing, write the results, successes or failures," Stern wrote in one message sent to more than 50 Conti members in March 2021.

The Conti chat logs span two years, from the start of 2020 until February 27, 2022—the day before the messages leaked. In February [WIRED reported on a small number of the messages](#), after they were provided by another source. The conversations are fragmented—think of taking your WhatsApp or Signal messages out of context—and were released in their original Russian form. WIRED reviewed a machine-translated version of the messages.

Some of the most revealing discussions take place between Stern and Mango, who acts as a general manager within Conti. Mango frequently launches into long monologues in private chats to Stern, either bemoaning team members or providing Stern with updates on the group's projects. "They seem to be responsible for procuring different tools for different departments and making sure that the employees are being paid," says Kimberly Goody, director of cybercrime analysis at security firm Mandiant.

The main Conti team consisted of 62 people, Mango told Stern in the middle of 2021. The exact number of Conti members fluctuates over time—at some points reaching around 100—as people join and leave the group. In one instance Stern says they are thinking of recruiting 100 more participants. "The group is so big that there are still middle managers," group member Revers tells Meatball in June 2021.

Potential workers are funneled into Conti's recruitment system from hacker forums and also legitimate job websites across the web. There's even something of an onboarding process: When one new member joins the group they're introduced to their team leader who will dish out their tasks. "I will hold a planning meeting in the evening and appoint you to the team," Revers says in another message.

"What could be striking at first glance is the size, structure, and hierarchy of the organization," says Soufiane Tahiri, a security researcher who has been [reviewing the documents](#). "They operate pretty much like a software development company, and contrary to popular belief it seems that many coders have salaries and do not take part in the paid ransom."

Rank-and-file programmers are paid around \$1,500 to \$2,000 per month for their work, but those negotiating ransom payments can take a cut of the profits. The group even claimed to have [an unnamed journalist on its payroll](#) in April 2021, who would get a 5 percent cut by helping put pressure on victims to pay up. "We have salaries on the 1st and 15th, usually 2 times a month," Mango tells one member of the group. Sometimes Conti members ask for extra money due to family problems—one claims they need more because their mother suffered from a heart attack—or because they're cash-strapped.

Money is a frequent subject of discussion within Conti—both a personal and group level. They debate the ransoms, often into millions of dollars, that they plan to charge businesses for providing them with decryption keys for their files. They discuss budgets available for buying equipment and the expenses of running physical offices and servers. "They also share a Google doc spreadsheet that contains a list of expenses," Goody says of one instance.

But some Conti members display the bombast of [cybercriminals caught driving luxury cars and storing piles of cash](#). Bio brags they have "80k" in their bank account and that they've "earned more this month with you than in 10 years." They quickly backtrack, saying they probably exaggerated. On another occasion Skippy says they purchased a 27-inch iMac with their earnings—"wanted all my life."

Skippy was also excited about taking a holiday from work. In November 2021 they said they planned to fly abroad in the new year but were warned by Mango they could be arrested. "It's up to you, of course, but I wouldn't fly abroad," Mango said. Skippy replied asking if they are meant to "sit in Russia" for the rest of their life. Mango advised making sure their phone is "clean" and not taking their laptop. On other occasions, gang members ask their superiors if the holiday they requested has been approved and if they can finish early.

"We found through our logs that they have the full plethora of manuals of how they should maintain team spirit," says Vitali Kremetz, the CEO of security company AdvIntel. Kremetz's research is [name-checked](#) by Conti multiple times throughout the chats. "They are not just making money, they are thinking about people and how to be more successful in the environment they have created."

Many of the conversations are dull, daily chatter as group members become acquainted and even friendly with each other. On New Years Eve 2021 some wished each other the best for 2022; members tell others they have caught Covid-19; they have issues with connectivity ("damn sorry my internet is dead"); and they bond with conversations about their partners or exes. The water cooler conversations are a stark contrast to Conti's dark work.

Despite some camaraderie, staff turnover is high. Members appear to frequently leave, which necessitates constant recruitment. As WIRED previously reported, during 2020 the Conti members, as part of the wider Trickbot cybercrime gang, [discussed opening six offices in St. Petersburg](#) for new recruits. In July 2021, Mango messaged Stern and said they were interested in moving onto Moscow "time" and starting a new company. Echoing the rise in remote working over the last two years, Stern replied: "now it's better to manage the team from a laptop."

Most of the leaked Conti chat messages are DMs sent with Jabber, but the group coordinates attacks using Rocket.Chat, a slack-style platform that can be easily encrypted. Like Slack or Microsoft Teams, Rocket.Chat lists a group's channels down a left-hand panel.

“There were channels created specifically for potential victims or infected victims,” says Émilio Gonzalez, a Canadian security researcher who studied the Conti files and re-created the group’s Rocket.Chat [conversations](#). Companies are listed as “dead” or “done” in channel names. Each channel has two to four participants with different levels of seniority and responsibilities, Gonzalez says. “The conversation usually starts with credentials or access to a specific machine on the network of the victim.” The attacks then progress from there. A review of February 2022 RocketChat messages by [The Intercept](#) shows the group discussing drug use and child sexual abuse content in general channels, and making antisemitic comments about Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky.

Beyond its chat messages, Conti uses common tools to organize. The team regularly references the [Tor browser](#) for getting online and GPG and ProtonMail for encrypted emails, uses Privnote for self-destructing messages, and shares files through [file.io](#), [gaz.im](#), and Firefox’s discontinued Send service. They also use databases, such as Crunchbase, to gather intelligence on the businesses they want to target.

Within Conti’s organizational structure is a team dedicated to open source intelligence that includes learning about potential threats. The group tried to purchase antivirus systems from security companies to test their malware against—creating [fake companies to do so](#). They circulate YouTube videos about the latest security research, watch what researchers say about them, and share news articles about the group. (One Conti member sent Stern a Russian summary of [WIRED’s February story about the Trickbot group](#) the day after it was published).

As with any workplace, Conti members get frustrated with their colleagues. People don’t reply to messages, they vanish while working (“he went to get a haircut”), and they complain about long working hours. “For my part, I do not agree with the idea that I should be in touch 24 hours,” Driver complained in March 2021. Working all hours of the day “is a direct path to burnout,” they said.

The gang fines members who underperform or don’t show up for work, [analysis of the chats](#) by security firm CheckPoint shows. “I have 100 people here, half of them, even 10 percent, do not do what they need,” Stern said to Mango in the summer of 2021. “And they only ask for money, because they think that they are fucking useful.” At another point, Stern scolds one person: “everyone works except for you.”

The Conti member Dollar is a particular pain. On January 20, 2022, the handle Cyberganster launched into a tirade about Dollar to Mango. “Let’s get the dollar out of the game,” Cyberganster writes. “He is a fucked up bastard.” It’s claimed that Dollar targeted hospitals with the group’s ransomware despite being told not to. Conti members say they have a rule of not attacking hospitals or medical centers, although a May 2021 attack against [Ireland’s health service cost](#) the organization \$600 million to recover from. Six days after the complaint from Cybergangster, Mango confronts Dollar. “You really [are] more problems than good,” one message in a series of 11 says. Mango says “everyone constantly complains about you and gets angry” and accuses Dollar of spoiling the gang’s “reputation” by targeting hospitals.

Despite their everyday work life being exposed, the Conti group hasn’t gone away. But the messages include a trail of personal details, such as the handles they use online, Bitcoin addresses, and email addresses. “If this information is true, it definitely makes life easier for law enforcement,” says Tahiri. “By dismantling the group behind Trickbot/Conti we can be sure that the whole infrastructure will suffer.” It’s something the group’s members are well aware of: “We are already in the news,” read one of the last messages sent before the leak.

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HEADLINE	03/15 Russia disinformation on social media
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/mar/15/russia-disinformation-social-media-ukraine">https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/mar/15/russia-disinformation-social-media-ukraine</a>
GIST	<p>As the war in Ukraine rages on, Russia is ramping up one of its most powerful weapons: disinformation. <a href="#">Social media</a> companies are scrambling to respond.</p> <p>False claims about the invasion have been spread by users in Russia as well as official state media accounts. Russia frequently frames itself as an innocent victim and has pushed disinformation including</p>



that the US [was providing](#) biological weapons to Ukraine ([denounced](#) by the White House as a “conspiracy theory”) and that victims of an attack on a Ukrainian hospital [were paid actors](#).

In response, companies including Meta, YouTube and [Twitter](#) have announced waves of new measures, spurred by pressure from the Ukrainian government, world leaders and the public.

But experts say the tech industry’s response has been haphazard and lacks the range and scope to tackle sophisticated disinformation campaigns. And even when policies exist, observers fear they are poorly and inconsistently enforced.

“By and large, platforms have responded to the challenge of state-backed disinformation campaigns by playing a futile game of Whac-a-Mole,” said Evan Greer, the deputy director of Fight for the Future, a digital rights non-profit group.

Tech companies have in some cases flagged misinformation as being state-sponsored or potentially false rather than removing it, or they have banned individual accounts rather than enacting more sweeping measures against mis- and disinformation.

When they have acted, it has often been too little, too late – YouTube, for example, [finally took action](#) on Friday against state-sponsored disinformation following weeks of pressure from human rights advocates, but not before that content was widely shared.

### **Opaque and inconsistent policies**

One of the most recent examples of this on-the-fly approach was Meta’s surprising decision to [make exceptions](#) to its longstanding rule against calls for violence, allowing users on Instagram and Facebook in 12 eastern European and western Asian countries to call for death to Russian soldiers. Following some confusion, the company later [clarified](#) that users still cannot call for the death of Vladimir Putin or other leaders.

For many, the episode underscored just how opaque the platforms have been when it comes to decision-making on Russia-related policies.

And it’s not just new policies that have lacked cohesion. [Facebook](#), Twitter, and YouTube already had rules about flagging state-sponsored content, but reports have found that these policies are often poorly enforced, allowing widely circulated posts featuring government propaganda to fall through the cracks.

A study released by the Center for Countering Digital Hate examined a sample of 3,593 recent articles posted by Russian state news sources and found Facebook was failing to label 91% of the posts as state-sponsored.

YouTube, for its part, has ramped up efforts to crack down on state-sponsored content, removing more than 1,000 channels and 15,000 videos. But the move came weeks after advocates called on the company to do so, and after videos spreading disinformation racked up thousands of views.

The biological weapons theory has proved a particular vulnerability for the platform. YouTube has not only failed to remove videos spouting these theories, a study from [Media Matters for America found](#), but it has also profited off them through monetized channels.

“Despite their stated policies, many of these platforms are not labeling disinformation and propaganda appropriately, and that’s a big problem,” said Heidi Beirich, an expert on rightwing extremism at the non-profit Global Project Against Hate and Extremism.

At the root of the problem is that the core business model these platforms operate makes them ideal for manipulation and abuse, said Greer.



“Instead of calling for more aggressive platform-level censorship, we should focus on monopoly power and the way that big tech platforms are designed.”

In other words, as long as these platforms value engagement over all else, there is little incentive to crack down on the lies and sensationalist content that generate a disproportionate amount of traffic.

Frances Haugen, the former Facebook employee turned whistleblower, said as much [in her testimony to Congress](#) in October 2021, noting that “there is no will at the top to make sure these systems are run in an adequately safe way”. She added: “Until we bring in a counterweight, these things will be operated for the shareholders’ interest and not the public interest.”

### **TikTok ‘overlooked’ as a misinformation vector**

While Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are facing increasing pressure to crack down on misinformation, [TikTok](#) has arisen as a new and often overlooked frontier.

As a relatively nascent platform, TikTok has seen rapid growth and little regulation. Researchers say from the start of the invasion of [Ukraine](#), they saw how quickly misinformation was shared on the platform.

“TikTok by its very design is meant to make it easy to splice videos, images, and sounds together, and that’s a useful tool for those attempting to push disinformation,” said Cindy Otis, a disinformation expert and author.

Some evidence points to the fact that disinformation may be Russia-coordinated. One study, [published by Media Matters for America on 11 March](#), showed how more than 180 Russian influencers on the platform had participated in a concerted propaganda campaign to promote online support for Russia’s war, sharing hundreds of posts with the hashtag #RussianLivesMatter.

TikTok has been so central to the conflict that the Biden administration recently invited TikTok influencers to the White House to brief them on the realities of the war and involve them in the fight against disinformation.

TikTok [shut down](#) its services in Russia more than a week ago to avoid action from the Kremlin, but some influencers there appear to be posting despite the ban.

A spokeswoman for the company said it has policies in place to combat misinformation and said, in response to Ukraine, the company expedited the rollout of its state media policy, which applies labels to Russia-controlled media accounts.

“We continue to respond to the war in Ukraine with increased safety and security resources to detect emerging threats and remove harmful misinformation,” said spokeswoman Jamie Favazza. “We also partner with independent fact-checking organizations to support our efforts to help TikTok remain a safe and authentic place.”

### **Misinformation on the rise within Russia**

Russia’s response to the crackdown by tech platforms has been swift and retaliatory, with the country blocking or reducing its citizens’ access to [Netflix](#), [TikTok](#), [Instagram](#), Facebook, and Apple. The country has also censored outside news outlets.

This in turn has increased the Russian state’s monopoly over information, an alarming development in a country where dissent and unbiased news was already under threat.

It’s a situation that has long existed in other digitally closed-off countries, with serious consequences. Experts fear that a Russian shutoff of news outlets and social platforms, imperfect as they are, could further restrict people from organizing against state power or fighting human rights abuses.

	<p>“Soon millions of ordinary Russians will find themselves cut off from reliable information, deprived of their everyday ways of connecting with family and friends and silenced from speaking out,” tweeted Nick Clegg, president of global affairs for Facebook’s parent company, <a href="#">Meta</a>.</p> <p>China, for example, <a href="#">has long</a> been able to control the narrative on its treatment of Uyghur people, which governments including the US have described as a genocide. Social media companies have been accused of indirectly supporting the human rights abuses by allowing misinformation about them to be shared on their platforms – and in some cases even accepting advertising money from the governments behind the actions.</p> <p>“We have all looked the other way with what social media firms are enabling in China, and now we are seeing it happen again,” Beirich said.</p> <p>“The big question for all of us is: what are the base values we should have around information?” she said. “This is showing why we want protected, free, and fair internet.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Army of volunteer hackers fight Russia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/volunteer-hackers-fight-russia">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/15/volunteer-hackers-fight-russia</a>
GIST	<p>Kali learned how to use technology by playing with his grandfather’s phone. Now, the Swiss teenager is trying to paralyse the digital presence of the Russian government and the Belarussian railway.</p> <p>Kali – and many others who contributed to this article – declined to share his real name because some of the action he is taking is illegal and because he fears Russian retaliation. He is one of about 300,000 people who have signed up to a group on <a href="#">the chat app Telegram</a> called “IT Army of Ukraine”, through which participants are assigned tasks designed to take the fight to Vladimir Putin. In so doing, they are trying to level the playing field between one of the world’s superpowers and Ukraine as it faces bombardment and invasion.</p> <p>The sprawling hacker army has been successful in disrupting Russian web services, according to NetBlocks, a company that monitors global internet connectivity. It says the availability of the websites of the Kremlin and the Duma – Russia’s lower house of parliament – has been “intermittent” since the invasion started. The sites for state-owned media services, several banks and <a href="#">the energy giant Gazprom</a> have also been targeted.</p> <p>“The crowdsourced attacks have been successful in disrupting Russian government and state-backed media websites,” says Alp Toker, the director of NetBlocks. He adds that Russia has attempted to mitigate the attacks and deter hackers by filtering access to certain websites, which has caused further disruption.</p> <p>Like many of his peers, Kali was directed to the Telegram group, which has Ukrainian- and English-language versions, by Mykhailo Fedorov, Ukraine’s vice prime minister and minister for digital transformation. Fedorov, 31, has been using his vastly expanded Twitter profile to plead with executives at the world’s biggest tech firms to cut ties with Russia. On 26 February, he <a href="#">posted a link</a> to the Telegram group, which was set up by his ministerial department. “We need digital talents,” he said. “There will be tasks for everyone.”</p> <p>While his home country has long maintained a policy of military neutrality, Kali was spurred to action when he saw Fedorov’s tweet. “I wanted to help and use my attacking skills to help Ukraine,” he says via Telegram. “I’m from Switzerland, but I’m a strong hacker and I’m so sorry for every Ukrainian. I do it because I stand with Ukraine and I want to help somehow. I think if we hack Russia’s infrastructure they will stop, maybe, because nothing will work any more.”</p> <p>Kali says his parents aren’t especially keen on what he is doing, although he tries not to tell them much about it. And he is not the only one.</p>

Caroline, a twentysomething from the New York metropolitan area, told her parents she had enlisted into the IT army just hours before we speak on the phone. “They’re starting to get concerned,” she says.

Having watched in horror as Twitter and Instagram videos revealed the devastating impact the conflict is having on Ukrainian civilians, Caroline felt compelled to act when she saw Fedorov’s tweet. She had seen how destructive the spread of disinformation had been during Donald Trump’s presidential campaign. “The 2016 election was an eye-opener to the unfortunate effects of these things, and how it really does affect some of our relationships out in the real world.”

There was just one problem: she didn’t know what Telegram was. Unlike Kali, the former preschool teacher isn’t much of a hacker. At first, she was concerned that the app – which was founded by the exiled Russian billionaires [Pavel and Nikolai Durov](#) – was a trap. But, after some research, she downloaded it and joined the group.

She felt out of her depth when the group’s administrators asked for hackers to bombard Russian state websites with distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, by which websites are bombarded with traffic to make them unreachable. This is how many Russian government websites have been disabled since the invasion began.

But Caroline realised things were getting lost in the torrent of information. Messages in the Ukrainian-language version of the group, for instance, can rack up hundreds of comments in less than an hour. So, she has been helping the English-language group by collating information for [a website](#) on how to support Ukraine and fight Russian disinformation campaigns. “I enjoy acting as that filter – as that wind to push the sails in the right direction,” she says.

She spends hours every day sharing information in the Telegram chat to help the masses of subscribers. “I can’t explain it,” she says. “It’s just something that’s so innately human that has been inspiring me, the more involved I get. I recognise I’m not special by any means, so all I’m doing is gathering all this information to try to dismantle these campaigns of disinformation that are going on.”

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Enrique is a Lithuanian IT expert in his mid-30s. He felt that joining the Telegram group was “the right thing to do”. “Growing up with your parents telling you stories about how they were exiled to Siberia lives with you your whole life,” he says. “We are scared that we will be next.”

He had largely overlooked the Russian occupation of the Donbas, an area in eastern Ukraine that Putin’s army invaded in 2014 and [claimed as Russian territory](#). But as the news became more urgent on Lithuanian television, he couldn’t ignore the situation any longer. He is less focused on wrecking the Russian internet and more on co-opting ordinary Russians to rise up against their dictator.

“I hope the world can put pressure on Russian people so much that they would be willing to re-evaluate their upbringing, understand that people are asking them to help, look at what is really happening and perhaps they will rise up that way,” he says.

Enrique has been inspired by the bravery of the Ukrainian people. That includes those who have taken to the streets to defend their country – and those who have taken to their keyboards. Ukraine has [290,000 people](#) who work in IT and is the world’s outsourcing tech desk. While many of them have given up their day jobs to fight for the army, others have signed up to the IT army.

That includes Sam, who works for a global advertising-technology company. He has been using his expertise to send what he calls “counter-propaganda” to Russians through advertising platforms.

“We’ve been in a hybrid war and a direct war with Russia since 2014,” he says. “It was the same, but on a smaller scale. We understand how Russia acts: they do propaganda here, then inside their country, then try to share their vision to the global community.”

The Ukrainian advertising industry has sent what Sam calls “aggressive” videos that show captured Russian soldiers pleading with their mothers and trying to convince them about the reality of war in Ukraine. Others highlight the impact of sanctions on Russia and the strength of the Ukrainian army. “They will move everyone to act,” says Sam.

About 100 advertising specialists from 50 agencies are designing and disseminating adverts to try to raise awareness within Russia and Belarus of what Russia is doing, ducking and diving around advertising bans and platform closures.

Enrique has been impressed by the teamwork of the volunteer IT army. “I have never seen so many people wanting to do something in my whole life,” he says. “You ask for participants to crash something [break it] or run something and you have it.” The immediacy of social media – and the thrill of seeing instantaneous results – has become intoxicating. “Everything is live,” he says. “Everything is being streamed to everybody. Everything is online and easy to understand how to damage.”

Alex, a Ukrainian software engineer, says the Telegram group is mostly used for DDoS attacks. “I wish there were more things to do in terms of helping the IT part [of the war].” He doesn’t want to cut off Russia from the internet, but rather find a way of showing Russians images of the war.

This is what Anonymous, a hacking collective, claimed to have done with [Russian TV channels](#) this month. “My ideal way would be to do something that will demonstrate the truth for [Russians],” says Alex. However, suggestions for DDoS attacks are eagerly carried out. When links for target websites go up in the Telegram group, he says, “all of them are down” within half an hour.

Some cybersecurity experts are worried, though. “There are some risks in having this volunteer army,” says Alan Woodward, a professor of cybersecurity at the University of Surrey. He is concerned about the lack of accountability regarding who is directing the battle plan and the overarching strategy. “At best, what they’re doing is running interference,” he says. “It may be a nuisance to the Russians, but the attacks we’ve seen so far haven’t really affected the Russian fighting capability to any decisive effect.”

Woodward says an army of 300,000 hackers will invariably include some bad seeds. “These volunteers might start attacking targets that are not really what the Ukrainian government wants,” he says. “This could be accidental. How often has ransomware spilled over and affected, say, a hospital? I don’t think anyone wants that.”

There is also a risk that such an open call could easily be co-opted by the Russians to generate negative headlines. “You never quite know who is in a volunteer group,” he says. “Not only could they do something unwanted in the name of Ukraine, but they could also do something that plays directly into the Russians’ rhetoric.”

The fear of infiltration is something that also concerns Agnes Venema, a national security and intelligence academic at the University of Malta. “How useful they are depends on how well you can vet them, how well you can coordinate them and how skilled they are,” she says. “Renaming Putin’s yacht is cute, but does the hacking of Russian television stations to play the Ukrainian anthem help the Ukrainians achieve their strategic goals?”

Despite her misgivings, Venema finds the corralling of volunteer forces remarkable. “I’m not one for throwing superlatives around, but I would say this level of civic engagement is unprecedented,” she says. Nonetheless, she says, it could quickly backfire. As soon as hackers start taking orders from the Ukrainian army, they drop their status as civilians and could be considered combatants, she says. “That means that these people are legitimate military targets,” she says.

Whether those defending Ukraine’s right to exist know or worry about that is another question. “I don’t care about it,” says Kali, who as we spoke was trying to DDoS a Russian news website that the Ukrainian IT army administrators had flagged as a source of disinformation. “I’ve never worried about it.”

HEADLINE	03/15 Calif. building nation's first privacy police
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/technology/california-privacy-agency-ccpa-gdpr.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=Technology">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/technology/california-privacy-agency-ccpa-gdpr.html?action=click&amp;module=Well&amp;pgtype=Homepage&amp;section=Technology</a>
GIST	<p>Ashkan Soltani, the head of California's new online privacy regulator, needed help launching the first agency of its kind in the United States. So he called the state's Horse Racing Board.</p> <p>Mr. Soltani asked Scott Chaney, the executive director of the racing board, which oversees roughly 10 racetracks, about the ins and outs of running a small agency in California's sprawling state government. They discussed how to handle remote work and hiring in the pandemic. Mr. Chaney also offered advice for navigating the public sector.</p> <p>Mr. Soltani is "literally inventing a state department," Mr. Chaney said. "He's almost inventing it from the ground up."</p> <p>Mr. Soltani faces the daunting task of overseeing the first government body in the United States with the sole job of regulating how Google, Facebook, Amazon and other companies collect and use data from millions of people. The office, the California Privacy Protection Agency, will be a more than 30-person group with a \$10 million annual budget to help enforce the state's privacy law, which is among the most stringent in the country.</p> <p>But first the agency has to be built — and Mr. Soltani, 47, a privacy expert who once served as the Federal Trade Commission's top technologist, has to overcome the lack of precedent. So he has reached out to groups not exactly adjacent to what his agency will be, like the racing board and others, for help navigating his new position.</p> <p>He has already encountered challenges. He and his colleagues have received reams of feedback from industry lobbyists. They face questions from privacy activists about whether their budget is substantial enough to police the world's largest companies. The board discussions need to be open to the public. And in the coming months, they must translate the feedback they have received into hard rules.</p> <p>"It's easily the most difficult thing I've done in my life, but also I think potentially the most impactful," said Mr. Soltani, who has been working from his home in Oakland, Calif.</p> <p>The new California agency reflects a larger shift in how the rules of the global internet are being set — and who is setting them. State capitals and foreign countries are <a href="#">increasingly taking a hands-on approach</a> to limiting online data collection, curtailing the tech giants' power and moderating extreme content on social media.</p> <p>They are filling a vacuum left by Congress. Lawmakers from both parties have long said they would support <a href="#">a national privacy law</a>. But negotiations in Washington have stalled, partly because of a dispute over whether a federal law should supersede state laws. California, Colorado and Virginia have enacted privacy laws. Utah passed a privacy bill this month and other states are considering their own proposals.</p> <p>Hayley Tsukayama, a legislative activist at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said lawmakers around the country were closely watching California's developments.</p> <p>"We're hearing from lawmakers who are looking at bills and saying, 'Do we need a privacy agency?'" she said.</p> <p>California's Privacy Protection Agency stems from a 2018 <a href="#">state privacy law</a> that gives residents the right to request their data from websites and have it deleted. The state attorney general was put in charge of creating rules under the law and suing companies that violated its terms. In 2020, privacy activists <a href="#">successfully campaigned</a> to pass a ballot measure that added more provisions to the law and established the new agency to carry them out.</p>



“We have the opportunity to protect privacy, understanding how that interacts with all of the innovative technologies that we’ve built here in California,” said Jennifer Urban, a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley, whom Gov. Gavin Newsom tapped to lead the new agency’s five-member board.

The board began meeting last year to discuss building the Privacy Protection Agency from scratch. In October, it hired Mr. Soltani, who has won a Pulitzer Prize, as the agency’s executive director.

Mr. Soltani soon went on a listening tour. In addition to the horse racing regulator, he talked with California’s Department of Justice, its consumer finance regulator and the state medical board. He also spoke with contacts involved in setting up federal agencies.

Mr. Soltani initially worked with staff members who were borrowed from other state agencies. The agency’s acting top lawyer previously was at the Department of Motor Vehicles, where he [helped write](#) rules for autonomous vehicles.

Hiring is now a big focus for the agency. The agency has posted jobs for a permanent general counsel, a director of public affairs and a senior policy adviser. It has told the State Legislature that it hopes to pay roughly 34 employees in the coming year.

The effort has attracted global interest. Wojciech Wiewiorowski, the European Data Protection Supervisor, said he spoke with Mr. Soltani this year and saw the California agency — with Silicon Valley in its backyard — as a potentially fruitful ally to rein in the tech giants.

Mr. Soltani also discussed the agency with President Emmanuel Macron of France and other officials at a dinner last year in Paris.

Cédric O, France’s secretary of state for the digital economy, who attended the meeting, said the country was “following with great interest what’s happening in California.” He said that he had spoken with Mr. Soltani and that the two had compared notes on tech regulation.

California’s approach will test whether having an agency solely for policing online privacy can make the United States a tougher regulator of tech giants.

Dedicated data protection agencies are the norm in Europe, where they enforce the bloc’s [General Data Protection Regulation](#), which mandates how websites can collect data from users. But reviews of how these groups have enforced the law have been mixed. Critics have said European governments lack the resources to take on Google, Amazon and others.

California faces similar doubts. The new agency’s \$10 million annual budget pales in comparison with Google’s \$76 billion in profit last year. And many tech companies that could be in its sights are enmeshed in the state’s economic fortunes and political machinations.

The agency “will be subject to a certain amount of political pressure,” said Tracy Rosenberg, the executive director of the nonprofit Media Alliance, a Bay Area public interest group, who also works with Oakland Privacy, a community group. “We don’t really know how the governor and Legislature are going to react if there is pushback because of actions the agency takes.”

The agency’s proponents said its independence was protected in part by its structure, with unpaid board members appointed separately by different elected officials. Mr. Soltani described the initial funding as “like the ante in a poker game” because voters have “bought in” for at least \$10 million, but said the Legislature could give more.

The agency’s first task will be to turn the state privacy law, which is broad, into detailed regulations for industry. That runs the gamut, from how data is used for targeted ads to more novel areas of the law, like how algorithms use personal information to make automated decisions. The law also demands that



businesses adhere to the privacy preferences that online users set in their browsers; it is up to the agency to decide what that means in practice.

Eventually, the agency will have the ability to enforce its rules. Businesses may also be required to submit audits of their cybersecurity risk to the agency. It has asked for input on what, exactly, those audits should include.

The agency has asked the public, nonprofits and businesses to submit comments to guide its initial rules. Privacy activists and industry groups have filed hundreds of pages of comments, trying to sway the agency's decisions. Google, for example, asked the regulator to write rules that provide "flexibility for businesses to respond to consumer requests in a manner that prioritizes substance over form" and to line up with privacy laws in other states.

A Google spokesman, Jose Castaneda, said in a statement that the company advocated national privacy legislation and as "the California Privacy Protection Agency continues its work, we will continue to constructively engage to ensure we protect our users' privacy."

The Privacy Protection Agency's board announced in February that it would hold workshops, likely this month, for more commentary from privacy experts and academics. At a meeting that month, Mr. Soltani said the group was likely to issue its first regulations later in the year so it could balance hiring a staff with the complex questions it had to address.

"We're building the car while we drive it," he said.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/16 Phony Instagram support staff emails</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://threatpost.com/phony-instagram-support-staff-emails-hit-insurance-company/178929/">https://threatpost.com/phony-instagram-support-staff-emails-hit-insurance-company/178929/</a>
GIST	<p>A phishing campaign used the guise of Instagram technical support to steal login credentials from employees of a prominent U.S. life insurance company headquartered in New York, researchers have revealed.</p> <p>According to a <a href="#">report</a> published by Armorblox on Wednesday, the attack combined brand impersonation with social engineering and managed to bypass Google's email security by using a valid domain name, eventually reaching the mailboxes of hundreds of employees.</p> <p><b>Scam Looked Identical to Instagram</b></p> <p>The attack began with a simple email. Disguised as an alert from Instagram's technical support team, it indicated that the recipient's account was under threat of deactivation. The intention, according to the report, was "to create a sense of urgency while instilling trust in the sender."</p> <p>"You have been reported for sharing fake content in your membership," read the body of the email. "You must verify your membership. If you can't verify within 24 hours your membership will be permanently deleted from our servers."</p> <p>This message fostered a sense of urgency, to goad the unsuspecting into clicking on a malicious "account verify" link. Targets who did so ended up on a landing page, where they were asked to submit their Instagram account login information. That information would go straight to the malicious actor, of course, unbeknownst to the target themselves.</p> <p>At no point did any of these steps "look to be malicious to the common end user, and every touch point, from the email to the account verification form, include Meta and Instagram branding and logos," the researchers noted.</p> <p>The attackers certainly left clues along the way. They made grammar, spelling and capitalization errors in the body of the phishing email. In the sender field, the "I" in "Instagram Support" was, in fact, an "L." And the email domain itself – membershipform@outlook.com.tr – clearly didn't come from Instagram.</p>

	Still, the domain itself was perfectly legitimate – allowing it to bypass traditional spam filters – and, the researchers explained, “the sender crafted a long email address, meaning that many mobile users would only see the characters before the ‘@’ sign, which in this case is ‘membershipform’ – one that would not raise suspicion.”
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Destructive malware targets Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ukrainian-targets-hit-destructive/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ukrainian-targets-hit-destructive/</a>
GIST	<p>Security researchers have discovered yet another destructive malware variant targeting Ukrainian machines, the fourth so far this year.</p> <p>ESET claimed to have made the find yesterday, noting that the “CaddyWiper” malware was seen on a few dozen systems in a “limited number” of organizations.</p> <p>The malware, which erases user data and partition information from attached drives, does not share any code similarities with the previous variants discovered by ESET: <a href="#">HermeticWiper</a> and IsaacWiper.</p> <p>The code was not digitally signed and is not reminiscent of any other malware ESET has detected in the past, the security vendor said.</p> <p>“Similarly to HermeticWiper deployments, we observed CaddyWiper being deployed via GPO, indicating the attackers had prior control of the target’s network beforehand,” <a href="#">it explained in a series of tweets</a>.</p> <p>“Interestingly, CaddyWiper avoids destroying data on domain controllers. This is probably a way for the attackers to keep their access inside the organization while still disturbing operations.”</p> <p>After analyzing information in the PE header, ESET determined that the malware was deployed the same day it was compiled.</p> <p>While HermeticWiper and IsaacWiper were both used in the early days of the Russian invasion, the fourth wiper malware, dubbed “WhisperGate” by Microsoft, was <a href="#">discovered in January</a>.</p> <p>In related news, the Ukrainian CERT <a href="#">has warned</a> of a new phishing campaign in which the sender impersonates government agencies to trick users into clicking on a booby-trapped link.</p> <p>The link will take users to a ‘Windows AV update page’ so that they can increase their security, the email claims. In fact, the “BitdefenderWindowsUpdatePackage.exe” will download and run the “one.exe” file from Discord, which is a Cobalt Strike beacon in disguise.</p> <p>Cobalt Strike is a legitimate pen-testing tool for remote access and lateral movement commonly used by threat actors.</p> <p>Another executable, “dropper.exe,” leads to the execution of two more payloads, in the form of the GraphSteel backdoor (microsoft-cortana.exe) and GrimPlant backdoor (oracle-java.exe).</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Israel govt. websites taken offline</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/israeli-government-websites-offline/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/israeli-government-websites-offline/</a>
GIST	<p>Israeli government websites were taken offline yesterday in what was described as the largest ever cyber-attack to be launched against the country.</p> <p>The widescale Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) successfully took down the websites of Israel’s Prime Minister’s Office and its interior, health, justice and welfare ministries. However, all these websites appear to be operational again.</p>

The official Twitter account of the Israel National Cyber Directorate confirmed the incident, writing: “In the past few hours, a DDoS attack against a communications provider was identified. As a result, access to several websites, among them government websites, was denied for a short time. As of now, all of the websites have returned to normal activity.”

The Israeli government has declared a state of emergency to study the extent of the damage caused and determine whether critical infrastructure services, such as electric and water firms, were affected.

Israeli publication *Haaretz* reported that the Israeli defense establishment said the DDoS attack targeted all websites using the gov.il domain, which is used for all government websites except defense-related ones.

A defense establishment source informed *Haaretz* that the incident represents the largest cyber-attack to strike Israel. The source also believes the attack was perpetrated by a nation-state actor or large organization but cannot currently determine who was behind it.

The *Jerusalem Post* reported that Iranian threat actors may have conducted the attack in retaliation for other events amid ongoing tensions between Israel and Iran.

Several alleged cyber-attacks have taken place between the two nations in the past year. For example, Israel was blamed for attacks on [gas stations](#) and a [nuclear facility](#) in Iran, while suspected Iranian hackers [reportedly hit multiple Israeli companies](#) with ransomware.

Commenting on the story, Toby Lewis, head of threat analysis at [Darktrace](#), said: “Historically, the primary protagonists involved in cyber-attacks against Israel have been groups aligned to the Iranian State, which is well known to operate a tit-for-tat reaction when it considers it has been attacked itself. This includes for example, a period of repeated DDoS attacks against US financial institutions following sanctions against Iran for its Nuclear Enrichment programme between 2011-2013. On Monday, Iran’s Revolutionary Guard claimed they had captured Israeli spies and saboteurs at a Nuclear Power plant at Fordow – a likely trigger point for such a retaliatory DDoS attack.

“It’s worth remembering that DDoS attacks are largely symbolic: they don’t tend to cause significant long-term damage and could simply be about saving face to show action has been taken although the public may not appreciate the superficial nature of such an operation.

“Nevertheless, security teams globally should remain vigilant. Whilst there is no evidence that this is the case in this instance, DDoS attacks might be used as a distraction technique whilst more stealthy operations take place behind the scenes. Defenders also shouldn’t rest on their laurels – sophisticated, state-sponsored ransomware remains a popular and concerning tactic that demands advanced technology to thwart.”

Speaking to *Infosecurity*, Ziv Gadot, CEO of [Red Button](#), noted that DDoS is becoming an increasingly common tactic for state-sponsored actors, exacerbated further by the recent Russia-Ukraine conflict. “Iran has been accused of using DDoS attacks to target the United States, while Russia has allegedly been behind such attacks in Estonia, Georgia and, most recently, Ukraine. In many cases, the main goal of the state sponsor is to undermine the reputation of their adversary, even more than it is to cause actual disruption.

“Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we have seen a growing concern regarding DDoS attacks in the US, Europe and Asia. Governments and high-profile businesses that are not directly involved in the conflict are on alert, as it is hard to predict how things will develop. Organizations need to be ready. Now is the time to evaluate if they are vulnerable to DDoS attacks. Fortunately, the mitigation technologies available to them today are relatively mature and easy to deploy.”

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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/hackers-hit-rosneft/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/hackers-hit-rosneft/</a>
GIST	<p>A cyber-attack has compromised the computer network of the German subsidiary of Moscow-based Russian energy company <a href="#">Rosneft</a>.</p> <p>German newspaper <i>die Welt</i> <a href="#">reported</a> the security incident on Sunday, describing it as a hacking attack. According to the newspaper, Germany's cybersecurity watchdog BSI had confirmed the breach and offered to help Rosneft restore its systems.</p> <p>BSI said that the attack occurred on Friday night or early Saturday morning. The Federal Cyber Security Authority has issued a warning to other energy companies to be on the alert for cyber-attacks.</p> <p>According to a <a href="#">report</a> by Stuttgarter Nachrichten, Rosneft reported the cyber-attack to the Berlin State Criminal Police Office on Saturday. The paper said a spokesperson said that the Berlin Public Prosecutor's Office initiated proceedings and commissioned the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) to investigate further.</p> <p>Although Rosneft's systems have been impacted by the attack, <i>die Welt</i> reported that neither the company's business nor its ability to supply energy had been disrupted.</p> <p>Security sources cited by the newspaper suspected the hacking collective "Anonymous" of being behind the attack after the group <a href="#">declared</a> its intention to hit Russian targets in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Anonymous has published a statement on social media claiming responsibility for the attack.</p> <p>The group <a href="#">wrote</a>: "Anonymous has attacked the energy company Rosneft. It is confirmed to have caused extensive damage. The attack captured a total of 20TB of data.</p> <p>"Rosneft is Russia's largest oil producer and is also involved in critical infrastructure in Germany."</p> <p>According to Stuttgarter Nachrichten, Anonymous was also able to remotely erase 59 smartphones and other electronic devices belonging to Rosneft.</p> <p>Rüdiger Trost from Finnish cybersecurity and privacy company <a href="#">F-Secure</a> commented that cyber-attacks on targets with links to Russia could act as incendiaries in an already tense geopolitical situation.</p> <p>He said: "The hackers of Rosneft see themselves as part of the Anonymous collective, but supposedly they are Germans. What if Russia interprets such a thing as an act of war by Germany?"</p> <p>Trost added: "We now see the real danger of a global cyber civil war that no one can control anymore."</p>
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## Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	03/15 Guilty plea: support to terror organization
SOURCE	<a href="https://katv.com/news/nation-world/man-pleads-guilty-to-attempting-to-travel-to-middle-east-to-join-islamic-state-elvin-hunter-bgorn-williams-seattle-washington-isis-isil-islam-terrorist-beheading-killing-egypt-syria-iraq-sea-tac-international-airport-fbis-joint-terrorism-task-force">https://katv.com/news/nation-world/man-pleads-guilty-to-attempting-to-travel-to-middle-east-to-join-islamic-state-elvin-hunter-bgorn-williams-seattle-washington-isis-isil-islam-terrorist-beheading-killing-egypt-syria-iraq-sea-tac-international-airport-fbis-joint-terrorism-task-force</a>
GIST	SEATTLE ( <a href="#">KOMO</a> ) — A 21-year-old Seattle man pleaded guilty on Monday in Seattle's U.S. District court to providing material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization.

<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>Elvin Hunter Bgorn Williams faces up to 20 years in prison after he was arrested May 28 at Sea-Tac International Airport on criminal charges related to his alleged efforts to join the Islamic State (IS) to engage in violent acts of terrorism in the Middle East or the United States.</p> <p>A lengthy investigation into his efforts to join IS, according to court documents, stated in November 2020 Williams began telling his family he was a member of the Islamic State, even posting about it on social media.</p> <p>The FBI monitored his activity and discovered he told his associates that if he could not travel overseas, he would commit an attack in the United States on behalf of IS. He then began communicating with people he believes to be IS recruiters.</p> <p>The plea agreement includes statements Williams made about his intentions: that he sought martyrdom, had “no problem with killing,” and hoped to be involved in beheading others.</p> <p>Williams booked an airline ticket last May from Seattle to Amsterdam to Egypt with the plan to join IS. He was arrested at the departure gate.</p> <p>The case was investigated by the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force in Seattle with assistance from the King County Sheriff’s Office; U.S. Customs and Border Protection; Homeland Security Investigations; Federal Air Marshals; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services; U.S Marshals Service; U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Transportation Security Administration; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Naval Criminal Investigative Service; Seattle Police Department; Bellevue Police Department; and Port of Seattle Police Department.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/14 IC annual threat assessment highlights
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/intelligence/ic-annual-threat-assessment-highlights-threats-from-nation-states-terror-groups-covid-disruption/">https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/intelligence/ic-annual-threat-assessment-highlights-threats-from-nation-states-terror-groups-covid-disruption/</a>
GIST	<p>In the coming year, the United States and its allies will face an increasingly complex and interconnected global security environment marked by the growing specter of great power competition and conflict, while collective, transnational threats to all nations and actors compete for our attention and finite resources. These challenges will play out amidst the continued global disruption resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, contention over global efforts to deal with a changing climate, increasingly powerful non-state actors, and rapidly evolving technology, all within the context of an evolving world order where the continued diffusion of power is leading actors to reassess their place and capabilities in an increasingly multipolar world. These challenges will intersect and interact in unpredictable ways, leading to mutually reinforcing effects that could challenge our ability to respond, but also introducing new opportunities to forge collective action with allies and partners against both the renewed threat of nation-state aggression and emerging threats to human security. The 2022 Annual Threat Assessment highlights some of those connections as it provides the Intelligence Community’s (IC’s) baseline assessments of the most pressing threats to U.S. national interests, while emphasizing the United States’ key adversaries and competitors. It is not an exhaustive assessment of all global challenges and notably excludes assessments of U.S. adversaries’ vulnerabilities. It accounts for functional concerns, such as weapons of mass destruction and cyber, primarily in the sections on threat actors, such as China and Russia.</p> <p>Competition and potential conflict between nation-states remains a critical national security threat. Beijing, Moscow, Tehran, and Pyongyang have demonstrated the capability and intent to advance their interests at the expense of the United States and its allies. China increasingly is a near-peer competitor, challenging the United States in multiple arenas—especially economically, militarily, and technologically—and is pushing to change global norms and potentially threatening its neighbors. Russia is pushing back against Washington where it can—locally and globally—employing techniques up to and including the use of force. In Ukraine, we can see the results of Russia’s increased willingness to use military threats and force to impose its will on neighbors. Iran will remain a regional menace with broader malign influence activities, and North Korea will expand its WMD capabilities while being a disruptive</p>

player on the regional and world stages. Major adversaries and competitors are enhancing and exercising their military, cyber, and other capabilities, raising the risks to U.S. and allied forces, weakening our conventional deterrence, and worsening the longstanding threat from weapons of mass destruction. As states such as China and Russia increasingly see space as a warfighting domain, multilateral space security discussions have taken on greater importance as a way to reduce the risk of a confrontation that would affect every state's ability to safely operate in space.

The lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to strain governments and societies, fueling humanitarian and economic crises, political unrest, and geopolitical competition as countries, such as China and Russia, seek advantage through such avenues as "vaccine diplomacy." No country has been completely spared, and even when a vaccine is widely distributed globally, the economic and political aftershocks will be felt for years. Low-income countries with high debts face particularly challenging recoveries and the potential for cascading crises leading to regional instability, whereas others will turn inward or be distracted by other challenges. The IC continues to investigate the concerning incidences of Anomalous Health Incidents and the danger they pose to U.S. personnel.

Ecological degradation and a changing climate will continue to fuel disease outbreaks, threaten food and water security, and exacerbate political instability and humanitarian crises. Great power competition and disputes between wealthy and low-income nations will threaten progress on the collective action that will be needed to meet global goals for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Other transnational challenges will pose an array of direct and indirect threats to the United States. They will interact in complex and cascading ways with each other and with threats posed by great power competition, increasingly empowered non-state actors, the pandemic, and climate change. Emerging and disruptive technologies, as well as the proliferation and permeation of technology into all aspects of our lives, pose unique challenges. The scourge of transnational organized crime, illicit drugs, violent extremism, and endemic corruption in many countries will continue to take their toll on American lives, prosperity, and safety. Both state and non-state cyber actors threaten our infrastructure and provide avenues for foreign malign influence threats against our democracy. We will see continuing potential for surges in migration from Afghanistan, Latin America, and other poor countries, which are reeling from conflict and the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic and political conditions in Latin America continue to spark waves of migration that destabilize our Southern neighbors and put pressure on our Southern border. Finally, ISIS, al-Qa'ida, and Iran and its militant allies will take advantage of weak governance to continue to plot terrorist attacks against U.S. persons and interests, including to varying degrees in the United States, and exacerbate instability in regions such as Africa and the Middle East.

Regional instability and conflicts continue to threaten U.S. persons and interests. Some have direct implications for U.S. security. For example, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan threatens U.S. interests, including the possibility of terrorist safe havens re-emerging and a humanitarian disaster. The continued fighting in Syria has a direct bearing on U.S. forces, whereas tensions between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan remain a global concern. The iterative violence between Israel and Iran, and conflicts in other areas—including Africa, Asia, and the Middle East—have the potential to escalate or spread, fueling humanitarian crises and threatening U.S. persons, as in the case of Al-Shabaab, which is leveraging continued instability in East Africa and the lack of security capacity of regional states to threaten U.S. interests and American lives.

The 2022 Annual Threat Assessment Report supports the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's transparency commitments and the tradition of providing regular threat updates to the American public and the United States Congress. The IC is vigilant in monitoring and assessing direct and indirect threats to U.S. and allied interests. As part of this ongoing effort, the IC's National Intelligence Officers work closely with analysts from across the IC to examine the spectrum of threats and highlight the most likely and impactful near-term risks in the context of the longer-term, overarching threat environment.

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[Read the 2022 Annual Threat Assessment Report](#)



SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/internal-review-finds-four-recent-cases-of-domestic-violent-extremist-activity-in-dhs-workforce/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/internal-review-finds-four-recent-cases-of-domestic-violent-extremist-activity-in-dhs-workforce/</a>
GIST	<p>An internal review of the Department of Homeland Security workforce found four cases of domestic violent extremist activity since fiscal year 2019 — data that could be higher because of “challenges with identifying, categorizing, and tracking” information specifically related to extremism allegations.</p> <p>The <a href="#">report</a> also recommended information-sharing between departments to identify the best ways to use employees’ publicly available information, “including social media checks, beyond the scope of personnel security vetting to identify and investigate violent extremist activity within the DHS workforce.”</p> <p>Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas directed the department in April 2021 to “immediately begin a review of how to best prevent, detect, and respond to domestic violent extremism threats within DHS.” A working group was established the next month to study and come up with solutions to detect, identify and combat potential internal extremist activity.</p> <p>At the outset, the working group issued a department-wide data call “to assess and analyze the scope of potential threats related to domestic violent extremism across DHS” since FY 2019. In the group’s report released Friday, the working group reported that the data call was hindered by the department’s practice of not classifying domestic violent extremism allegations as a misconduct subcategory but lumped them into other categories such as workplace violence. The investigating authority for such allegations also varied, from internal investigations at the different DHS components to the DHS Office of Inspector General.</p> <p>“Other gaps that limited our ability to collect and validate data included (1) the lack of an official definition of ‘domestic violent extremist;’ (2) guidance as to what constitutes violent extremist activity, or an established list of behaviors that may be indicators of violent extremism; (3) the lack of a centralized, interoperable DHS-wide investigative case management system; and (4) lack of standardized reporting and information sharing mechanisms for investigating allegations of violent extremist activity,” the report added.</p> <p>In the data call, DHS headquarters and components were asked to provide “anonymized data for the number and results of investigations, insight into how the allegation was initially discovered, the disposition, and other investigative data points.” The data call categorized each of the allegations as racially or ethnically motivated domestic violent extremism, animal rights/environmental-related domestic violent extremism, abortion-related domestic violent extremism, anti-government/antiauthority domestic violent extremism, and all other domestic terrorism-related threats</p> <p>This process surfaced 35 allegations of potential domestic violent extremist activity between FY 2019 and the third quarter of FY 2021. The U.S. Coast Guard was not included in the working group’s review as incidents there are addressed by the Uniform Code of Military Justice and were included in the Defense Department’s own extremism review.</p> <p>“Upon further review of the allegations, the working group identified four incidents that involved active participation or support for violent extremist activity over the covered period,” the report said. “The other 31 allegations were either unsubstantiated as being related to domestic violent extremism or found to be miscategorized in the data call responses.” The report does not go into detail about the circumstances of the four substantiated cases.</p> <p>“Because of the challenges with identifying, categorizing, and tracking this information, it is possible that the data call resulted in an under-reporting of the number of allegations made and investigations conducted,” it added. “Future efforts to educate the workforce and provide clear guidance about what constitutes violent extremist activity and how to report it, along with other recommendations in this report, will help ensure that future data calls are more reliable.”</p> <p>The working group issued 15 recommendations intended to “establish baseline policies and guidance” for identifying and responding to potential future cases of domestic violent extremist activity within the department, “promote employee awareness, enhance methods to identify and address violent extremist</p>

activity, foster an integrated approach, and ensure the protection of privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties.”

“Clarity and consistency as to what constitutes violent extremist activity in the context of DHS employment will help support employee awareness and ongoing efforts to address related activities,” the report said, advising that the department also “adopt an approved list of behaviors that may be indicators of domestic violent extremism, in collaboration with DHS partners and stakeholders, which will best position DHS to prevent, detect, and respond to potential threats related to domestic violent extremism internal to the Department.”

The working group drafted a comprehensive DHS Directive, in coordination with several DHS components, to serve as a foundational document on how to identify and respond to violent extremist activity within the department. The group also “identified 62 courses and 21 books available through DHS learning management systems that may be updated to incorporate domestic violent extremism examples and guidance.”

The working group developed the “Domestic Violent Extremism Awareness Discussion Guide for Department Leaders” to help “inform employees of their obligations to refrain from violent extremist activity and the existing reporting requirements... leadership will be able to reference examples of what is considered protected speech, employee standards of conduct, case studies of violent extremist activity, frequently asked questions, and additional resources and references.”

Specialized training was also recommended for positions such as background investigators, CRCL inquiry officials, and DHS Insider Threat Program personnel to identify, evaluate, and respond to threats more effectively and “engage with individuals who may be displaying early indicators of extremist behavior or may be radicalizing to violence.”

“One of the most effective methods of preventing domestic violent extremists from entering the DHS workforce is to discourage individuals engaging in violent extremist activities from applying to the Department in the first place,” the report noted. “Clearly articulating the Department’s position on violent extremist activity in its recruiting, hiring announcements, and other human capital activity is critical in this regard.”

The working group also recommended a single reporting mechanism within the department dedicated to potential extremism activity and additional funding for the DHS Insider Threat Program.

The report advises that the department “explore expanding the use of publicly available information, including social media, beyond personnel security vetting, to identify or investigate potential violent extremist activity within the DHS workforce.”

“Studies and pilots have suggested that certain online activity may represent behavior of potential concern to national security and could be useful in assessing an individual’s trustworthiness, judgment, or reliability,” the report continued.

“PAEI, including social media checks, have proven to be of limited value as stand-alone sources of information. However, when coupled with and corroborated by other data and investigative follow-up, the use of PAEI can be a powerful tool in preventing and detecting domestic violent extremism-related threats... it is critical that any study or implementation of social media collection is pursued deliberately to protect the privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties of all individuals.”

The DHS Insider Threat Executive Steering Committee should facilitate the implementation of the working group’s final recommendations and coordinate any related actions, the report said.

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HEADLINE	03/15 US troops’ exit limits counter-terror fight?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/15/us-military-somalia-afghanistan/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/15/us-military-somalia-afghanistan/</a>

U.S. troops' exit from Afghanistan and Somalia has limited the United States' ability to conduct counterterrorism operations against groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, the American generals in charge of the Middle East and Africa told senators Tuesday.

"In my view, we are marching in place at best," Army Gen. Steven Townsend, who leads U.S. Africa Command, told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee of the security picture in Somalia. "We may be backsliding."

For years, the United States has been trying to weaken the terrorist organization al-Shabab, which Townsend has called "the most lethal arm of al-Qaeda." Those efforts were complicated in the last year, following the full exit of U.S. troops from Somalia, a departure ordered by President Donald Trump near the end of his tenure in the White House.

Townsend said that counterterrorism efforts have experienced reduced efficacy due in part to the fact U.S. troops have been "commuting to work" from neighboring Djibouti, where the U.S. military maintains a permanent base.

Monitoring al-Shabab from "over the horizon," as the Pentagon characterizes the dynamic, means U.S. forces are unable to apply "sufficient pressure," Townsend said, adding: "We really can't get at the al-Shabab problems."

It's a warning akin to those voiced by U.S. Central Command leader Marine Corps Gen. Kenneth "Frank" McKenzie before the United States pulled out of Afghanistan last year. He had said in the lead-up to last summer's withdrawal that monitoring terrorist groups once there was no U.S. presence in the region would be "[extremely difficult](#)" — though "not impossible."

During Tuesday's Senate hearing, McKenzie confirmed that the United States has not launched any strikes in Afghanistan since the last aircraft departed Kabul at the end of August as he predicted that Islamic State-Khorasan, the Islamic State's affiliate in Afghanistan and Pakistan, was poised to have a resurgence. McKenzie told senators that ISIS-K has managed to execute high-profile attacks "even in Kabul" in recent months.

"We're coming out of the winter; traditionally, this would now begin the fighting season," he added. "It is my expectation that ISIS attacks will ramp up in Afghanistan as we go into the summer."

McKenzie projected confidence that the Taliban, a sworn enemy of the Islamic State, would attempt to quash ISIS-K, despite having freed an estimated thousand of their fighters when they released prisoners from jails that had been maintained by U.S. forces. But McKenzie noted that things were "much less firm" when it comes to al-Qaeda, which has historically enjoyed a relationship of convenience with the country's ruling Taliban.

For now, it appears that the United States is largely in a mode of watching and waiting. The U.S. military relies heavily on Washington's relationship with Pakistan to conduct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions regarding Afghanistan. But there is no formal basing arrangement — nor is the Biden administration likely at any point to bless the reintroduction of U.S. troops into or over Afghanistan.

What may transpire regarding U.S. forces and Somalia, however, is an open question.

On Tuesday, the Senate Armed Services Committee's ranking Republican, Sen. James M. Inhofe (Okla.), asked Townsend point-blank if he had recommended to his chain of command that the Defense Department reintroduce U.S. forces to Somalia on a full-time basis.

Townsend acknowledged that he had indeed submitted a recommendation regarding Somalia to his superiors — but categorically refused to characterize what it contained, noting they were "still considering that advice, and I'd like to give them space to make that decision."

HEADLINE	03/15 Plea bargains for 9/11 defendants?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/plea-bargains-are-being-discussed-for-sept-11-defendants-11647377742?mod=hp_lead_pos12">https://www.wsj.com/articles/plea-bargains-are-being-discussed-for-sept-11-defendants-11647377742?mod=hp_lead_pos12</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—Military prosecutors have begun plea negotiations at Guantanamo Bay with Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four co-defendants accused of orchestrating the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, a deal under which the defendants would admit guilt and prosecutors forgo pursuit of a death sentence, defense attorneys said.</p> <p>If successful, the negotiations could end a legal saga that has lasted nearly two decades, beginning with the capture in Pakistan of Mr. Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the attacks. Mr. Mohammed and other detainees <a href="#">were allegedly tortured</a> in overseas “black site” interrogation centers and were finally interned in the high-security prison at Guantanamo Bay, where a seemingly irreconcilable conflict between fairness to the accused and deference to the Central Intelligence Agency’s secrets has stymied trials for years.</p> <p>“Negotiated agreements represent one path to ending military commissions, stopping indefinite detention at Guantanamo Bay, and providing justice,” said attorney Alka Pradhan, who represents one of the defendants, Ali Abdul Aziz Ali, also known as Ammar al-Baluchi.</p> <p>A Pentagon spokesman declined to comment. Representatives for the Justice Department didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment.</p> <p>The discussions, reported earlier by the <a href="#">New York Times</a>, may be different for each of the five detainees, according to a person familiar with the matter. The others are Walid bin Attash, Ramzi Binalshibh and Mustafa al Hawsawi.</p> <p>Figures considered more peripheral to the plot, such as Mr. Hawsawi and Mr. al-Baluchi, may seek more lenient terms, including the possibility of eventual release or the chance to serve their sentences in other countries, the person said. In the past, plans to try the Sept. 11 defendants in federal court or negotiate plea deals were scuttled after <a href="#">political blowback</a> or opposition from senior officials.</p> <p>The military commissions now operating at Guantanamo descend from former President George W. Bush’s November 2001 <a href="#">order authorizing tribunals</a> to try noncitizens accused of war crimes without regard to constitutional protections or appeals to the federal courts. The Supreme Court voided that plan in 2006 and since then successive acts of Congress <a href="#">retooled military commissions</a> to more closely resemble courts-martial, where U.S. service members are tried.</p> <p>But many legal questions remain unresolved, including which <a href="#">constitutional rights apply in military commissions</a>. The prosecutions remain mired in pretrial hearings that have focused on the degree to which evidence of the defendants’ treatment in CIA custody can be weighed in evaluation of the government’s case and in mitigation of potential punishment.</p> <p>There has been little debate regarding the defendants’ guilt. In 2008, saying they sought martyrdom, the five men attempted to plead guilty in an earlier iteration of the commission system. A military judge, unsure of whether capital defendants were permitted to plead guilty, declined to accept the pleas, and the proceedings later were restarted under a modified framework.</p> <p>Because the defendants’ treatment stands beyond the bounds of any legal system—a Senate Intelligence Committee report said Mr. Mohammed was waterboarded at least 183 times—defense lawyers have suggested they would argue the government should be sanctioned by removing the death penalty from consideration.</p> <p>Aware that a military jury or appellate court could make such findings, in 2017 the then-head of the military commissions apparatus, Harvey Rishikof, began exploring a potential plea deal. After word</p>

spread, then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis dismissed Mr. Rishikof for what Mr. Mattis said were unrelated reasons.

The circumstances now, however, are different. While the legal obstacles to a capital trial remain, several longtime commissions prosecutors, including Brig. Gen. Mark Martins and Robert Swann, have since retired. President Biden opposes both the death penalty and the continued operation of Guantanamo Bay.

Earlier this month, the U.S. repatriated to Saudi Arabia detainee Mohammed al-Qahtani, the alleged 20th hijacker authorities believed would have joined the terrorists on United 93 had an immigration officer not refused him entry at Orlando International Airport in August 2001.

Mr. al-Qahtani initially had been slated to be charged along with the current Sept. 11 defendants; a row for him was built in the Guantanamo courtroom. In 2009, the military commissions head [dismissed charges](#) against Mr. Qahtani after finding he had been tortured while in military custody.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 HRW: 107 civilians killed in Mali attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/100-civilians-killed-mali-recent-months-83466049">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/100-civilians-killed-mali-recent-months-83466049</a>
GIST	<p>BAMAKO, Mali -- More than 107 civilians have been killed in recent months in Mali in attacks by Mali's army and jihadist groups linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, Human Rights Watch said Tuesday.</p> <p>Among the civilians killed since December 2021, Mali's soldiers have been responsible for at least 71 of the deaths, the international rights organization said in a report.</p> <p>Mali's army has contested some of the report, while adding that it is investigating a number of the attacks and allegations.</p> <p>The army has been accused of abuses against civilians in southwest and central Mali as soldiers try to stem violence from jihadist fighters who have been staging attacks for nearly a decade.</p> <p>"The victims, mostly summarily executed, include traders, village chiefs, religious leaders and children," the organization said in its report.</p> <p>Islamic extremists are responsible for killing at least 36 civilians since December, according to the report.</p> <p>"There has been a dramatic spike in the number of civilians, including suspects, killed by the Malian army and armed Islamist groups," said Corinne Dufka, Sahel director at Human Rights Watch. "This complete disregard for human life, which includes apparent war crimes, should be investigated and those found to be implicated, appropriately punished."</p> <p>Since the Malian crisis in 2012, civilians continue to pay the price of war, with more than 320,000 people displaced, according to HRW.</p> <p>Hundreds of civilians have been killed, with extremists, rebels, ethnic militias and security forces implicated, the organization said. Most of the killings have occurred in central Mali, the epicenter of conflict since 2015, it said.</p> <p>Jihadists have also targeted and killed hundreds of security force members.</p> <p>A spike in violence comes as the French military has begun withdrawing troops from Mali. Many fear that the jihadis could now regain territory as France continues pulling out its soldiers over the next five months.</p>

	<p>France first intervened in 2013, leading a military operation to force Islamic extremists from power in towns across northern Mali. But in the years since, those militants have carried out scores of attacks against the Malian military and U.N. peacekeepers.</p> <p>The rights report comes as neighboring Mauritania accuses the Malian army of recurrent abuse against its civilians in Malian territory. The Mauritanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also summoned the Ambassador of Mali. On Sunday, the prosecutor at the Bamako military court announced the opening of investigations into the allegations by Mauritania.</p>
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## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Despite sanctions, US funds Russia labs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/biden-under-fire-us-funding-scientific-testing-cat/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/15/biden-under-fire-us-funding-scientific-testing-cat/</a>
GIST	<p>President Biden is under fire for allowing U.S. tax dollars to fund government research in Russia, including “stomach-churning” scientific tests on cats, despite championing economic sanctions against the country for its invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Republican lawmakers say that if Mr. Biden is serious about punishing Russia’s belligerence, the White House needs to stop subsidizing Moscow’s research labs. They note that Russia has four facilities conducting scientific research that are approved by the National Institutes of Health to receive grants funded by American tax dollars.</p> <p>“Our tax dollars should never be going to our foreign adversaries, especially as the U.S. puts crippling sanctions on the Kremlin,” said Rep. Lisa C. McClain, Michigan Republican.</p> <p>The push to end funding for Russian labs comes as the White House has imposed economic penalties on the country’s leadership for its unprovoked war in Ukraine. Since the fighting broke out, Congress has banned imports of Russian oil, while Mr. Biden has levied sanctions on Moscow’s leading oligarchs and financial institutions.</p> <p>Some Republicans say, however, that those sanctions are meaningless if federal tax dollars continue to flow to Russia’s state-run research labs.</p> <p>“This should be a bipartisan, common-sense position,” Mrs. McClain and colleagues recently wrote in a letter to the White House. “As such, [the administration] must take swift and decisive action to block any further U.S. tax dollars from going to Russian research labs.”</p> <p>The White House did not return requests for comment on this article.</p> <p>Apart from the geopolitical concerns of funding Russian research labs, Republican lawmakers say, U.S. tax dollars should not be going to subsidize “heinous experiments” on innocent animals.</p> <p>The White Coat Waste Project, an animal rights group, revealed in a study that the NIH provided a grant totaling more than \$549,000 to Russia’s state-run Pavlov Institute of Physiology in November. The money, in part, went to fund spinal cord research on unwitting cats.</p> <p>Specifically, the cats had a portion of their brains removed, while electrodes were implanted in their spines. The animals were then forced to walk on treadmills for hours on end while scientists ascertained the impact on their spinal cords.</p> <p>“The torture these poor animals are being forced to go through is absolutely inhumane and unnecessary,” said Mrs. McClain. “It’s common sense to stop funding this inhumane research.”</p>



	<p>Most of the cats did not survive long after the experiment was finished. In 2018, the NIH provided a similar grant, totaling more than \$220,000, to the Pavlov Institute for experimentation on cats.</p> <p>“Taxpayers shouldn’t be forced to pay white coats in the Russian government to torture and kill cats in wasteful treadmill experiments,” said Mackie Burr, vice president of the White Coat Waste Project. “There are four Kremlin-run animal testing labs that NIH has authorized to receive our money, and U.S. sanctions against Russia should include defunding them.”</p> <p>The NIH’s funding in Russia is only the latest revelation about the agency’s troubling relationship with powers seen as hostile to the U.S.</p> <p>Last year, government documents exposed that the NIH had funded scientific research at China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology. Experts have long viewed the facility as a possible source for the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, given that the pandemic first emerged in the city where the institute is located.</p> <p>“At least 31 labs located in Russia and China are still permitted to receive U.S. taxpayer money from the NIH that goes specifically to animal experiments – this must end,” said Rep. Nancy Mace, South Carolina Republican. “Now.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/16 Study: pollen season longer, nastier</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/climate-change-pollen-season-study/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/climate-change-pollen-season-study/</a>
GIST	<p><a href="#">Climate change</a> has already made allergy season longer and pollen counts higher, but you ain't sneezed nothing yet.</p> <p>Climate scientists at the University of Michigan looked at 15 different plant pollens in the United States and used computer simulations to calculate how much worse allergy season will likely get by the year 2100. It's enough to make allergy sufferers even more red-eyed.</p> <p>As <a href="#">the world warms</a>, allergy season will start weeks earlier and end many days later — and it'll be worse while it lasts, with pollen levels that could as much as triple in some places, according to a new study Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications.</p> <p>Warmer weather allows plants to start blooming earlier and keeps them blooming later. Meanwhile, additional carbon dioxide in the air from burning fuels such as coal, gasoline and natural gas helps plants produce more pollen, said study co-author Allison Steiner, a University of Michigan climate scientist.</p> <p>It's <a href="#">already happening</a>. A study a year ago from different researchers found that from 1990 to 2018, pollen has increased and allergy season is starting earlier, with much of it because of <a href="#">climate change</a>.</p> <p>Allergists say that pollen season in the U.S. used to start around St. Patrick's Day and now often starts around Valentine's Day.</p> <p>The new study found that allergy season would stretch even longer and the total amount of pollen would skyrocket. How long and how much depends on the particular pollen, the location and how much greenhouse gas emissions are put in the air.</p> <p>With moderate cuts in <a href="#">greenhouse gas emission</a> from coal, oil and natural gas, pollen season would start 20 days earlier by the end of the century. In the most extreme and increasingly unlikely warming scenario, pollen season in much of America will start 40 days earlier than when it has generally started in recent decades.</p> <p>Already about 30% of the world and 40% of American children suffer pollen allergies, which hurt the economy through lost work days and medical costs, said University of Michigan climate researcher Yingxiao Zhang, lead author of the new study.</p>

	<p>Allergies are especially difficult for the 25 million Americans with asthma. This could make the problem much worse for them, said Amir Sapkota, a University of Maryland environmental health professor, who wasn't part of the research.</p> <p>While allergy suffering will increase across the United States, the Southeast will get hit hardest, said Steiner.</p> <p>The start of alder tree pollen season will move most dramatically, an issue in the Pacific Northwest. Cypress tree pollen — which is especially bad in Texas — will see among the biggest increases.</p> <p>Ragweed and grasses — common pollen allergies — will also have longer seasons and higher pollen counts in the future, Zhang said.</p> <p>The University of Michigan team's projections projects would be about twice as large a jump in pollen problems as has happened since 1990, said University of Utah biologist and climate scientist Bill Anderegg.</p> <p>"Overall, this is an incredibly important study," said Anderegg, who wasn't involved in the new research. "It tells us that the historical trends of longer and more severe pollen seasons are likely to continue, driven by climate change, and this will absolutely have substantial health consequences in allergies and asthma for Americans."</p>
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## Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	03/16 UN: Myanmar junta human rights violations
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/03/16/myanmar-junta-committing-human-rights-crimes/9151647417098/">https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/03/16/myanmar-junta-committing-human-rights-crimes/9151647417098/</a>
GIST	<p>March 16 (UPI) -- Myanmar's junta is engaged in systematic and widespread human rights violations, some of which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, the United Nations' human rights chief said in a new report that calls on the international community to do more to end the crisis in the Southeast Asian nation.</p> <p>In the report, published Tuesday to coincide with a meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Council, Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. high commissioner for Human Rights, states the Tatmadaw military forces have shown a disregard for human life since seizing power in a coup on Feb. 1 by bombarding populated areas with airstrikes and heavy weapons as well as targeting civilians, some of whom have been shot in the head and burned to death.</p> <p>"Myanmar is facing violence on a massive scale," the report states. "Arbitrary detentions, unnecessary and disproportionate use of force against peaceful protesters, extrajudicial killings as well as ill-treatment and torture in custody have characterized the Tatmadaw's seizure of power."</p> <p>The report, based on interviews with more than 155 victims, details the security forces' use of landmines and hidden improvised explosives to maim and kill people throughout the country as well the military's so-called clearance operations where forces comb areas in search of resistance groups to arrest, torture and summarily execute them and in the process loot and destroy property.</p> <p>Airstrikes and mortar and artillery shelling as well as other explosives were deployed in these ferreting operations, resulting in some 550 deaths.</p>

It also states that there are at least 85 reported instances of the Tatmadaw forcing individuals to perform labor and to act as human shields for advancing troops.

The military, under the pretext of elections irregularities, seized control of the country more than a year ago and arrested several members of its civilian government before putting itself at the helm of the country. It then met the subsequent protests of its coup with a bloody and ongoing crackdown.

According to Myanmar's Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, the junta has killed 1,676 people while the U.N. report states more than 12,500 have been detained with at least 440,000 others having been displaced. Another 14 million, it said, are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

Bachelet said that despite the violence the will of the public to regain control of its country has not been broken.

"They remain committed to seeing a return to democracy and to institutions that reflect their will and aspirations," she said in a statement accompanying the report.

The protesters have the support of the United States and other democratic countries who have repeatedly enforced sanctions against Myanmar, targeting members of the junta as well as state-operated entities in order to cut off revenue to the military.

However, Bachelet in the report called on the international community for further action as it is urgently needed to "stem the pace at which individuals are being stripped of their rights, their lives and their livelihoods."

She said that Myanmar's military has created an environment where negotiations and dialogue cannot occur and where the country's citizens have no voice.

"The breadth and scale of violations of international law suffered by people of Myanmar call urgently for broader measures of justice and accountability that address more comprehensively the full range of violations that have been and continue to be suffered across the country," she said.

"Sustained serious violations of international law demand a firm, unified and resolute international response to effectively protect the human rights of the people of Myanmar," she said.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Mass violence motivated by misogyny</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/federal-pages/dhs/secret-services-latest-research-highlights-mass-violence-motived-by-misogyny/">https://www.hstoday.us/federal-pages/dhs/secret-services-latest-research-highlights-mass-violence-motived-by-misogyny/</a>
GIST	<p>Today, the U.S. Secret Service <a href="#">National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC)</a> released <i>Hot Yoga Tallahassee: A Case Study of Misogynistic Extremism</i>, a new analysis highlighting the role of misogyny in targeted violence.</p> <p><a href="#">Hot Yoga Tallahassee: A Case Study of Misogynistic Extremism</a> is a case study examining the 2018 shooting at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida, during which two women were killed, four more were injured, and the attacker committed suicide. The case study provides a detailed look into the attacker's background and personal history, presenting decades of prior concerning behaviors, many of which were directed at women. While the attacker had previously pursued higher education, served in the military, and held highly regarded professional positions of trust, his behavior had caused alarm among his parents, siblings, friends, roommates, coworkers, workplace managers, school officials, students, law enforcement, the online community, neighbors, and other community members.</p> <p>"The latest case study by the National Threat Assessment Center examines the background of an attacker who displayed decades of disturbing misogynistic behavior, ranging from inappropriate comments and touching, to stalking and assaults," said U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center Chief Dr.</p>

Lina Alathari. “Communities must remain aware of misogynistic extremism, while pursuing prevention efforts that are designed to identify and intervene with those who pose a risk of violence.”

The case study published today closely examines the specific threat posed by misogynistic extremism, while stressing that an individual’s behavior should remain the primary focus of violence prevention efforts, regardless of whether or not the individual subscribes to a specific extremist ideology or self-affixes a label to their extremist beliefs.

As concluded in previous research, there continues to be no single profile of an attacker. Rather, attackers tend to demonstrate observable concerning behavior across a variety of community systems, which often elicits concern in bystanders before violence occurs. This case study describes how the attacker’s misogynistic views and associated behaviors resulted in him being fired from multiple jobs, banned from public locations, and being arrested.

The case study also sets forth that a multidisciplinary threat assessment program established at the community level may reduce the risk of future tragedies if the appropriate systems are in place to identify warning signs, assess an individual’s risk of violence, and apply the appropriate community resources. Such proactive safety programs have been established by workplaces, universities, local police departments, and other organizations with a role in public safety.

The Secret Service will continue to build on our threat assessment methodology and provide research findings and guidance to public and private sectors, to enhance the prevention efforts of those charged with safeguarding our nation.

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[Read more at U.S. Secret Service](#)

HEADLINE	<b>03/15 UK blocks Assange extradition appeal</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/uk-blocks-assanges-extradition/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/uk-blocks-assanges-extradition/</a>
GIST	<p>The highest court in the United Kingdom has refused to hear an appeal by WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange against his extradition to the United States to face espionage <a href="#">charges</a>.</p> <p>Australian citizen Assange was <a href="#">indicted</a> by the US Department of Justice in 2019 over his alleged involvement in the acquisition and publication of thousands of classified US diplomatic and military documents in 2010.</p> <p>The leaked documents related to the wars between the United States and Afghanistan and between the United States and Iraq.</p> <p>In January 2021, Westminster Magistrates’ Court District Judge Vanessa Baraitser <a href="#">blocked</a> Assange’s extradition to the US on mental health grounds after medical expert Professor Michael Kopelman said that extraditing Assange could place him at very high risk of suicide.</p> <p>The US government subsequently launched an appeal against Baraitser’s decision. Following a two-day High Court hearing in October 2021, the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, Lord Burnett of Maldon, sitting with Lord Justice Holroyde, ruled in <a href="#">favor</a> of the US in December 2021.</p> <p>The judges found that Baraitser’s decision was based on the scenario that should Assange be extradited to the US, he would be imprisoned under highly restrictive conditions.</p> <p>US authorities assured the judges that Assange would not be held in such conditions before his trial or after his possible conviction unless he committed an act that made the imposition of such restrictions necessary. In addition, they said that Assange would not be held in an “ADX” super maximum-security prison in Colorado pre-trial and <a href="#">assured</a> the judges that he could be transferred to serve his sentence in Australia if convicted.</p>

	<p>Assange subsequently attempted to appeal against the December judgment. However, on Monday, the UK's Supreme Court refused him permission to appeal "as the application didn't raise an arguable point of law."</p> <p>Assange's case is now expected to be formally sent to home secretary Priti Patel for a final decision. His lawyers will have four weeks in which to make submissions to Patel.</p> <p>The WikiLeaks founder, who is 50 years old, is engaged to <a href="#">marry</a> his 38-year-old fiancée, lawyer Stella Moris, in Belmarsh prison on March 23.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/16 Latin America gangs muscle into Madrid</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/epx8xz/madrid-latin-gangs-dpp">https://www.vice.com/en/article/epx8xz/madrid-latin-gangs-dpp</a>
GIST	<p>MADRID — Jaime Guerrero Mesoussi tried desperately to escape after he was stabbed in the heart with a machete.</p> <p>Video from CCTV cameras caught the 15-year-old being attacked on the 5th of February by eight members of another gang armed with knives outside the Kapital nightclub in Madrid's Atocha, a rundown area of the Spanish capital.</p> <p>The teenager, Pepe, who was armed with a machete, staggered and fell to the ground, bathed in blood. When medics arrived, they pumped his chest to try and revive him but there was nothing they could do.</p> <p>Just one hour after the attack on Pepe, 25-year-old Diego Rodriguez died from multiple stab wounds to his back. In a separate gang fight, the same night, three teenagers were gouged with machetes.</p> <p>The gangs remain a constant threat, say police, who deploy a dedicated task force to prevent their violent feuds spilling over into normal life. Earlier this month, a 17-year-old boy was seriously injured after being stabbed in the chest in a <a href="#">fight in Madrid between rival gangs</a>.</p> <p>The killings mark the latest chapter in a bloody gang war between Los Trinitarios and Dominican Don't Play (DDP), two of Spain's most feared Latin gangs, who have returned in force after lockdown.</p> <p>Trinitarios and DPP members are second or third generation descendants of emigrants from the Dominican Republic who moved to Spain, battling it out on the streets of Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. Other gangs in Spain are the Latin Kings and the Ñetas, who come from Puerto Rico.</p> <p>The Trinitarios and DDP were started by Dominican prisoners in Rikers Island prison in New York, but have spread their reach far beyond the US, to Spain, Britain and Latin America after being deported or deciding to start a new life abroad.</p> <p>In 2020, these gangs were blamed by police for 18 murders and 88 sex attacks in Madrid, mainly linked to prostitution or abuse of the gangs' female followers.</p> <p>Now police and authorities fear fresh violence will erupt into an all-out war on the streets.</p> <p>Gangsters have been linked by police to violent street robberies, acting as mules for the major drugs gangs, running prostitution rings, possession of arms and belonging to criminal organisations.</p> <p>They have no female members and some sexually humiliate their girlfriends or women in their circles in order to emphasise their misogynistic credentials.</p> <p>Regular people in Madrid do not normally get caught in the crosshairs of gang violence. But the violence the gangs mete out is much greater than their numbers suggest and they have created a climate of fear in the capital.</p>

Gang members are not even scared to take on the police. "One officer who was giving chase stopped dead in his tracks when a gang member pointed a gun at him, but it misfired," a police source told VICE World News.

Today, there are about 400 members of these gangs across Spain, double the figure last year, say experts. These gangs have grown as other gangs declined because after their leaders were jailed.

More than 500 extra heavily armed police were drafted into Madrid last month to try to prevent a full blown conflict between the Trinitarios and the DDP.

The gangs establish in rundown, unfashionable neighbourhoods in the centre of Madrid or suburban towns. In a series of operations last month, 19 gang members were arrested, 11 of them from the Trinitarios and the rest from DDP.

As the COVID pandemic has waned, police believe the gangs want to win back control over the Madrid underworld. But during the lockdown, which was one of the strictest in Europe, they could not get back on the streets.

Out of school and with little else to do, they started to glorify the violence of gang life so joined up and became foot soldiers who were used by the gang leaders when they needed to start fights with rivals, police said.

"During the lockdown and restrictions, many of these young people were looking at their phones and at TikTok and identifying with these gangs and their symbols. They would start to use their symbols," said a police source who did not want to be identified.

"They feel more cool, more important but without thinking about the consequences. Now that the pandemic has eased off, the gangs can move about more and confront each other. But now there is a new group of younger gang members that we do not know because they are so young they have no record."

So, why are children barely out of elementary school joining gangs where they risk being cut up with machetes?

"Many of these children are watching videos and they think it is glamorous to join these gangs. They think the gang would be like another family. Or some gang members will be their friends," said Katía Nuñez, an anthropologist at the University of Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona who has written a PhD on the Latin American gangs in New York and in Spain.

"Their leaders are much older and do not have to fight with machetes in the street. Anyone who is sent to prison is replaced by their lieutenants."

The machete is their calling card because it is seen as a symbol of Dominican national culture, where it was traditionally used to cut sugar, an important crop for the country. The knives are 60cm long and have names like Amazonas, Black Panther and Zombie Killers. They're sold for as little as €16.

"These machetes are the weapon of choice for these gangs. They are easy to get and they allow people to fight but not to get too close to the person they are trying to hurt," Carlos Rodriguez, an inspector with the Madrid Municipal police, told VICE World News. "Sometimes they hide them inside their trousers so that they can surprise their enemies."

Sympathetic bar owners will sometimes hide machetes for the gangsters before a planned attack, said Rodriguez.

"Once we arrived at a bar and found eight or nine machetes," he says.



Spain's government wants to bring in stricter restrictions to stop gang members getting their hands on these huge blades. At present to obtain a machete, all someone needs is to show a shopkeeper their ID and proof they are over 18. They usually buy these blades from specialised shops or normal hardware stores.

Among those arrested on suspicion of the murder of Diego Rodriguez – the 25-year-old who died of stab wounds – was a Trinitario leader, named by police as Sandy Antonio CC, nicknamed Chuky. He had been arrested in November in a major police operation against prostitution in which women were being drugged and sexually abused. The gangs exploit prostitutes for their own sexual gratification, often drugging them first.

Chuky was released on bail for the alleged murder of Rodriguez, on 4 February. He has not been charged with any offence, as charges usually follow much later under the Spanish legal system.

Police sources said the person they suspect ordered the execution was Ayrton Carriola, known as Peru, who was described as “very dangerous, a complete fanatic”.

'Chamaquito', whose real name is Andrés Alexandre Martínez Sandoval, is said by police to be one of the most violent members of the DDP.

He has been accused of recruiting children as young as 12 to reinforce his control of the crime group and because he knows kids younger than 14 cannot face criminal charges in Spain. They contact him through social media, friends or directly by approaching Chamaquito. To ensure their loyalty, he orders more junior gang members to deal out punishments like beatings if they fail to follow his orders like carrying out attacks, robberies or drug dealing.

The Trinitarios take their name from the three founding fathers of the Dominican Republic, who formed a secret society called Trinitaria Identity while they fought for independence for the tiny Caribbean state from foreign powers that ruled the country at the turn of the 20th century.

In a homage to the same spirit of independence, the gang was formed to defend the rights of Dominican prisoners inside New York's tough jails. When New York gang members were expelled from the US to the Dominican Republic after serving prison sentences, they moved to Spain. Others are the sons of migrants who made new lives in Spain.

The gang uses their country's motto: Dios, Patria y Libertad (God, Fatherland and Liberty).

As authorities in the US cracked down on the Trinitarios and other Latin gangs, their tentacles spread beyond America. They now have factions in Latin America, Spain and Britain.

DDP sprang to life after a split within the Trinitarios in prison in New York.

One of the Trinitarios' founders, Julio Martínez – known as El Caballo (The Horse) – had a fight with another member of the same gang and the DDP was born.

Today, on the streets of Spain these gangs are made up of second- or third- generation migrant families. Police say 90% have Spanish nationality.

Unlike other Latin gangs like the Mexican Mafia, the Trinitarios and DDP do not normally have any distinctive tattoos. Instead, they have their own hand signals.

Trinitarios extend their two first fingers while DDP has another hand gesture which means fatherland – a national symbol in the Dominican Republic. It consists of three fingers up with the ring finger held down.

Lots of gangsters use TikTok to post gang signs. The DDP use #d3 and #ad3 which represents ‘the love of three’. Their rivals, the Trinitarios, use #d7, which shows the gang’s values of peace and love, despite its violent reputation.

Social media helps stoke fear of the gangs.

“There were rumours that a gang like the Latin Kings had rituals of initiation like being beaten up but no-one I spoke to among the Dominicans said this was the case,” said Nuñez.

The Latin Kings, which originated from the descendants of migrants from Puerto Rico or the US mainland, were once the most feared Latin gang but have fallen into decline in Spain.

Eric Javier Jara Velástegui, the leader of the Latin Kings, who is known as The Wolverine, is serving a 21-year jail term for rape and assault committed in Madrid in 2003.

Gang members speak in code and organise attacks on rival gangs using numbers to hide what they’re going to do from police, says Nuñez.

“I interviewed someone in prison who told me if we say 27 it means we are going to organise an attack on that day,” Nuñez told VICE World News.

Cops closely monitor social media messages to find out what the gangs are doing, where influencers with knowledge of gang activity post ominous warnings.

Influencers warned the gangs would cut down anyone – gangster or not.

“Kids, this coming weekend, don't set foot in Madrid. Last weekend they killed a Trinitario and there will be a lot of bloodlust. Go with your head and be careful because they have already said that they do not care about people who are from the gangs or not,” wrote one.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Red flags missed in 2018 mass shooting</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/us/florida-yoga-studio-gunman-misogynist-extremism.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/us/florida-yoga-studio-gunman-misogynist-extremism.html</a>
GIST	<p>A yearslong trail of red flags signaling a Florida man’s escalating hatred toward women was missed by the authorities before a 2018 shooting at a Florida yoga studio that left two dead and five injured, the U.S. Secret Service found in a new report.</p> <p>In a 28-page <a href="#">case study</a> released on Tuesday, the agency said that the <a href="#">Nov. 2, 2018, attack</a> carried out by Scott P. Beierle at Hot Yoga Tallahassee highlighted the specific threat posed by “misogynistic extremism,” which is sometimes referred to as “male supremacy.”</p> <p>The report was compiled by the <a href="#">National Threat Assessment Center</a>, which is part of the Secret Service and whose role is to analyze threat data and the response of law enforcement.</p> <p>Investigators say that the red flags multiplied exponentially over the years. They included arrests for battery, repeated allegations of stalking and outward demonstrations of an animus toward women.</p> <p>Mr. Beierle once wrote a screenplay about an outcast teenage boy who becomes a serial killer, exacting revenge against the girls who had rejected him, investigators found. When the police close in, in a foreshadowing of events, the boy kills himself.</p> <p>“Communities must remain aware of misogynistic extremism, while pursuing prevention efforts that are designed to identify and intervene with those who pose a risk of violence,” Lina Alathari, chief of the threat assessment center, said in a statement on Tuesday.</p> <p>In the months before the attack, which ended when Mr. Beierle, 40, took his own life, he had researched a cheerleading camp in Florida, investigators found. The Secret Service said that it had also learned that Mr. Beierle had once visited a sorority house at Florida State University in Tallahassee where the serial killer <a href="#">Ted Bundy</a> had murdered two women and attacked several others.</p>

“The attacker was motivated to carry out violence by his inability to develop or maintain relationships with women, along with his perception of women’s societal power over men,” the report said. “For decades prior, he engaged in numerous instances of inappropriate and criminal behavior directed toward women and girls.”

His views, investigators said, aligned with those of men who identify as involuntary celibates or “incels,” whose lack of successful relationships with women fuel their hostility toward them.

The Secret Service said in the report that those who committed such acts of violence did not fit a common profile.

“What most attackers share, however, are observable concerning behaviors displayed prior to engaging in violence,” the report said. “Although every act of targeted violence may not be prevented, the risk of future tragedies can be reduced if the appropriate systems are in place to identify the warning signs, gather information to assess the risk of violence and apply the appropriate community resources.”

Alex DiBranco, the executive director and a co-founder of the [Institute for Research on Male Supremacism](#), said on Tuesday that the report reinforced disturbing details about Mr. Beierle that emerged in the weeks and months after the shooting.

“He’s an example of where there’s a lot of red flags,” Ms. DiBranco said. “It’s kind of shocking that he was able to do these kinds of things going forward.”

The targeting of a yoga studio fit a pattern, she said, adding that it was not surprising that Mr. Beierle had become fixated with cheerleaders and sororities.

“They’re associated in the minds of perpetrators with young, unattainable, attractive women,” Ms. DiBranco said.

According to the Secret Service report, Mr. Beierle was fired from his job at an insurance call center while he was in college because of his harassment of a female co-worker, who declined to press criminal charges. That episode, along with others, inspired him to write a song called “Stalker.”

In 2006, Mr. Beierle was the focus of a police investigation in Maryland, where he had been teaching at the time and was accused of inappropriate conduct by a female high school student, investigators found. No criminal charges were brought against Mr. Beierle, who the authorities said had asked the student if she would ever appear in Playboy magazine and if she would wear low-cut shirts.

While Mr. Beierle was serving in the U.S. Army in Europe beginning around 2008, four female airmen in the U.S. Air Force accused him of inappropriate conduct, the report said. In 2010, he was honorably discharged for “unacceptable conduct.”

In 2012, Mr. Beierle was arrested for groping two women at a dining hall at Florida State University, but those charges were dropped because of a lack of evidence.

And in 2016, he was charged with battery after slapping and groping a woman by the pool at his apartment complex, a charge that was dropped after Mr. Beierle completed court-mandated counseling sessions for sex addiction.

That same year, Mr. Beierle was fired from his job as a substitute teacher by a public school district in Florida for violating its internet use policy, according to investigators, who said that he had viewed pornography and images of cheerleaders on a school device.

	<p>On Nov. 2, 2018, Mr. Beierle used his first and middle names to sign up for a class at Hot Yoga Tallahassee, where he paced around with his newly purchased yoga mat. The class had already started when he put on hearing protection, pulled out a Glock pistol and opened fire.</p> <p>Ms. DiBranco, whose research specializes in violence toward women, said that it was encouraging to see investigators focus on the missed warning signs of misogynistic extremism.</p> <p>“We’ve definitely seen progress in the last few years in recognizing male supremacy as an ideology,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Couple tried to sell military secrets to Brazil</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/us/politics/submarine-spy-brazil.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/us/politics/submarine-spy-brazil.html</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — In 2020, a United States naval engineer and his wife made the fateful decision to <a href="#">try to sell some of America’s most closely guarded military secrets</a>, the technology behind the nuclear reactors that power the U.S. submarine fleet.</p> <p>Then the couple faced another important choice: To which foreign government should they try to peddle the stolen secrets?</p> <p>The engineer appeared to believe that soliciting American adversaries like Russia or China was, morally, a bridge too far, according to <a href="#">text messages released in court</a>. Instead, Jonathan and Diana Toebbe thought of a country that was rich enough to buy the secrets, not hostile to the United States and, most importantly, increasingly eager to acquire the very technology they were selling: Brazil.</p> <p>The identity of the nation approached by the Toebbes has until now remained shielded by federal prosecutors and other government officials. But, according to a senior Brazilian official and other people briefed on the investigation, Mr. Toebbe approached Brazil nearly two years ago with <a href="#">an offer of thousands of pages of classified documents</a> about nuclear reactors that he had stolen from the U.S. Navy Yard in Washington over the course of several years.</p> <p>The plan backfired almost as soon as it began. After Mr. Toebbe sent a letter offering the secrets to Brazil’s military intelligence agency in April 2020, Brazilian officials handed the letter over to the F.B.I. legal attaché in the country.</p> <p>Then, beginning in December 2020, an F.B.I. undercover agent posed as a Brazilian official to win Mr. Toebbe’s trust and persuade him to deposit documents in a location chosen by investigators. Mr. Toebbe eventually agreed to provide documents and offered technical assistance to Brazil’s nuclear-submarine program, using classified information he had learned from years working for the U.S. Navy.</p> <p>Mr. and Ms. Toebbe, who lived in Annapolis, Md., were arrested in October and <a href="#">pleaded guilty</a> to espionage charges last month. He faces up to 17 and a half years in prison; she faces up to three.</p> <p>Brazil has continued to struggle with its submarine nuclear reactor program, and has approached Russia to seek a partnership on the nuclear-reactor design, said a Russian military official who, like all the people interviewed for this article, spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the classified material and delicate diplomacy involved.</p> <p>Last month, just a week before Russia invaded Ukraine, President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil even brought up the technology during <a href="#">a trip to Moscow</a>.</p> <p>Mr. Bolsonaro has tried to maintain <a href="#">a positive relationship with President Vladimir V. Putin</a> of Russia, even amid his aggressions toward Ukraine. Analysts in Brazil believe that Mr. Bolsonaro, a former army captain, is in part hoping to keep the door open for a partnership on the nuclear reactor technology.</p>

The Brazilian president's trip to Russia drew criticism from the Biden administration. Asked about Brazil's efforts to acquire Russian nuclear reactor technology, a senior administration official said Tuesday that seeking to acquire Russian military technology "is a bad bet for any country."

In some respects, Brazil was an odd choice for the Toebbes. While Brazil and the United States have a limited military relationship, Mr. Toebe's outreach came during a period of some of the closest Brazil-U.S. relations in decades, as Mr. Bolsonaro and former President Donald J. Trump strengthened the countries' alliance.

While the U.S. government initially wanted to release the name of the country the Toebbes had tried to sell the secrets to, Brazilian officials insisted their cooperation not be publicly disclosed, according to a person familiar with the investigation.

The White House, Justice Department and F.B.I. declined to comment. American officials have repeatedly said the couple had not tried to sell the secrets to the United States' chief adversaries, nor to its closest NATO allies, like France.

In encrypted messages from 2019 recovered by the F.B.I., Mr. Toebe and Ms. Toebe discussed what appear to be different plans to sell the secrets. One plan, Mr. Toebe wrote, was wrong to even consider. Another plan, presumably to sell to a friendlier country, was also questionable for Mr. Toebe, but Ms. Toebe pushed for it.

"It's not morally defensible either," Mr. Toebe wrote, according to a transcript of the court proceedings. "We convinced ourselves it was fine, but it really isn't either, is it?"

Ms. Toebe responded: "I have no problems at all with it. I feel no loyalty to abstractions."

Mr. Toebe's public defender has said government rules prevent him from answering questions. A lawyer for Ms. Toebe declined to discuss the case ahead of her sentencing, currently set for August. She has repeatedly said in court that the government has presented selected messages out of context.

There were only a few countries that were not overtly hostile to the United States and could make use of the technology and designs Mr. Toebe had to sell. Only a country able to build a nuclear reactor and ready to invest billions in a nuclear submarine fleet would be willing to funnel him the hundreds of thousands of dollars in cryptocurrency that he was seeking.

Brazil began work on developing nuclear submarines in 1978, originally motivated by its rivalry with Argentina. In 2008, under the administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Brazil reinvested in an effort to create a nuclear submarine, to better patrol and protect its exclusive economic zone in the Atlantic Ocean, a source of fossil fuels and other resources.

The country aims to launch its first nuclear-powered submarine in 2029, part of a \$7.2 billion submarine program. Brazil is building four more traditional submarines with the help of France, but it has been attempting to develop a fifth submarine powered by a nuclear reactor on its own — a project it has struggled with.

As a result, Mr. Toebe's expertise, on how to make nuclear reactors even quieter and harder to detect, as well as other design elements of Virginia-class submarines, would have been of enormous value to Brazil.

While the Brazilian embassy declined to comment, a senior Brazilian official said the country had cooperated with American investigators because of the two nations' partnership and friendly relations between Brazil's intelligence service and the C.I.A.

Had Brazil gotten caught seeking to purchase American secrets, the relations between the two countries, including intelligence sharing, could have been thrown in jeopardy.

	<p>Instead, Brazilian officials worked with the F.B.I. after Mr. Toebe was initially hesitant to deposit the classified information at a prearranged secret location, called a dead drop.</p> <p>“I am concerned that using a dead drop location your friend prepares makes me very vulnerable,” Mr. Toebe wrote, according to court records. “For now, I must consider the possibility that you are not the person I hope you are.”</p> <p>To trick Mr. Toebe into believing he was speaking with a Brazilian official, the undercover agent told him to look for a signal placed in a window in a Brazilian government building in Washington over Memorial Day weekend last year. Such an operation could only have been carried out with the cooperation of Brazilian officials in Washington.</p> <p>After seeing the sign, Mr. Toebe agreed to drop a sample of the nuclear secrets he stole from the Navy hidden in a peanut butter sandwich in West Virginia, setting off a chain of events culminating in the October arrest of the couple.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Police: ex-death row inmate killed in prison</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.q13fox.com/news/police-ex-death-row-inmate-killed-in-washington-prison">https://www.q13fox.com/news/police-ex-death-row-inmate-killed-in-washington-prison</a>
GIST	<p><b>WALLA WALLA, Wash.</b> - A man who had <a href="#">formerly been on death row for the 1999 murders of his wife and her two daughters</a> was killed at <a href="#">Washington State Penitentiary</a> on Sunday, state Department of Corrections officials said.</p> <p>Corrections officials said Dayva Cross, 62, was pronounced dead about 1:15 p.m. after he was found in a shower, the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin <a href="#">reported</a>.</p> <p>Officials said a suspect has been identified and moved to "appropriate housing" pending further investigation.</p> <p>The Walla Walla County Coroner's office confirmed Sunday that the death is considered a homicide. Walla Walla Police Department detectives responded to the scene and are investigating.</p> <p>The state Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that the death penalty violates Washington's Constitution because it is imposed in an arbitrary and racially biased manner.</p> <p>A Department of Corrections spokesperson told the newspaper Monday afternoon that movement in the unit where Cross died remains restricted.</p> <p>On March 6, 1999, after arguing with wife Anouchka Baldwin, Cross stabbed her to death along with her daughters Salome Holly, 18, and Amanda Baldwin, 15, in Snoqualmie. He was arrested after another daughter of Anouchka Baldwin's, then 13, escaped and called police.</p> <p>A King County Superior Court jury <a href="#">decided in 2001 that Cross should be put to death</a>, rejecting pleas by his lawyers that he was mentally ill and should not be executed.</p> <p>His death sentence was converted to life in prison when Washington's Supreme Court ruled in 2018 that the state's use of capital punishment was unconstitutional.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Everett police: stabbing suspect kills 1</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/everett-stabbing-suspect-attacks-two-people-killing-one">https://komonews.com/news/local/everett-stabbing-suspect-attacks-two-people-killing-one</a>
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. - One person died and another is fighting for her life in a hospital after a Tuesday morning stabbing.</p>



	<p>The Everett Police Department said the man was stabbed and killed in the 3100 block of Oakes Avenue around 10:22 a.m.</p> <p>A woman was reportedly also stabbed and has been taken to the hospital, according to officer Kerby Duncan. It's unclear how serious her injuries were.</p> <p>Police say the suspect, a man in his 20s, was tracked down at a family member's home near Lynnwood and arrested by Snohomish County deputies.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Tacoma court 'disruption'; defendant tazed</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/south-sound-news/man-tackled-shocked-with-stun-gun-after-pierce-county-jury-finds-him-guilty-murder/T7E42NRKIRD37OQUEQHS4CKZJQ/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/south-sound-news/man-tackled-shocked-with-stun-gun-after-pierce-county-jury-finds-him-guilty-murder/T7E42NRKIRD37OQUEQHS4CKZJQ/</a>
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — The defendant in a Pierce County murder trial was tackled and shocked with a stun gun by sheriff's deputies Monday afternoon when he threw an object toward prosecutors as the judge polled jurors to confirm the man's guilty verdict.</p> <p>Andrew Pointer, 38, was convicted by a jury in Superior Court of first-degree murder and unlawful possession of a firearm in the Aug. 4, 2019, fatal shooting of 38-year-old Lawrence Jeffries.</p> <p>Pointer's sentencing date was set for April 4. The standard sentencing range for such cases is 39 years, 3 months to 50 years, 8 months in prison. The defendant has 12 prior felony convictions, including third-degree rape, second-degree assault and bail jumping.</p> <p>Judge James Orlando was polling the jury for confirmation of the verdict and had just made it to the back row of jurors when Pointer grabbed something from the desk in front of him and hurled it toward the prosecutors' table. Deputy prosecutor Thomas Howe later said he didn't know what Pointer threw, that he just saw it fly past his head.</p> <p>"Get down, get down!" a Pierce County Sheriff's Department deputy said as multiple others tackled Pointer. "You're going to get tazed," one deputy told him while they tried to get him under control.</p> <p>The stun gun buzzed. Then again after a second warning.</p> <p>"I don't give a [expletive] about no Taser," Pointer said. "That [expletive] don't hurt."</p> <p>At least eight deputies helped to detain the man. He was taken from the room in a spit hood.</p> <p>The jury was escorted out of the courtroom, and Orlando completed polling. He said he apologized to the jurors for having to witness the "disruption."</p> <p>During the five-week trial, Pointer argued he shot Jeffries out of self defense. But prosecutors said the shooting stemmed from a "long-time disagreement" over how Pointer should treat his girlfriend, whom Jeffries used to date and had a 16-year-old daughter with, according to charging documents.</p> <p>Pointer and Jeffries fought after the defendant got into an argument with his girlfriend at a Lake Tapps gathering. Pointer lost his fight with Jeffries. Prosecutors said Pointer was "beat down."</p> <p>Early the next morning, the woman's daughter called to say Pointer was at their home and wanted to speak with her. Pointer allegedly told his girlfriend to come home and bring Jeffries, promising he only wanted to talk.</p> <p>When they arrived, Pointer was dressed all in black and was holding a hand behind his back. Witnesses said the men argued briefly before Pointer shot Jeffries twice and fled in a car.</p>

	<p>The woman ducked when gunshots rang out and later told police Pointer had previously told her “if he ever had to kill anyone for her that he would kill her, too,” records show.</p> <p>On Monday, the jury found Pointer not guilty of attempted murder related to his girlfriend.</p> <p>Pointer had a different account of the shooting. In a memorandum, the defense said Pointer was moving his belongings out of the residence he shared with his girlfriend. He apparently left the residence, but then returned for a forgotten wallet and arrived at the same time as Jeffries and others.</p> <p>“Mr. Pointer heard someone yell, ‘He’s in the back’, and Mr. Pointer turned in time to see an individual at the front of the residence cock a gun, and Mr. Jeffries approach him in an apparent attempt to pistol whip him,” the memo reads.</p> <p>A scuffle ensued, and the defense said Pointer got control of Jeffries’ firearm and fired one shot, killing him.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/15 Arrest: threats to shoot up middle school</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/teen-arrested-after-threats-shoot-up-moses-lake-school/VCAGHKBF5BBNBDPG2GFHGJRSAI/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/teen-arrested-after-threats-shoot-up-moses-lake-school/VCAGHKBF5BBNBDPG2GFHGJRSAI/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>MOSES LAKE, Wash. — A teen was arrested Monday after threats were made to shoot up a middle school and the boy was on campus with a firearm, according to the Moses Lake Police Department.</p> <p>Officers were given information that a student had made threats to shoot up Chief Moses Middle School.</p> <p>Arriving officers made contact with the student in class and recovered a pistol, as well as two magazines of ammunition.</p> <p>After the weapon was secured, the eighth-grade student was arrested.</p> <p>Investigators discovered the student had a list of potential targets.</p> <p>The school district notified the people on the list and are taking steps to offer services to those affected.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>03/15 Seattle focus on repeat criminal offenders</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/city-attorney-crime-repeat-offenders/281-f324289b-8740-42bc-9266-f0db7b9e2fb6">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/city-attorney-crime-repeat-offenders/281-f324289b-8740-42bc-9266-f0db7b9e2fb6</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>SEATTLE – City Attorney Ann Davison is launching a new program dubbed the High Utilizer Initiative to identify offenders responsible for repeated crimes across Seattle and reduce their impact on public safety.</p> <p>The program has already identified 118 individuals who have been responsible for more than 2,400 criminal cases over the last five years throughout the city.</p> <p>Of the 118 individuals the program has identified, each of them has 12 or more referrals from police to the city attorney's office in the last five years and at least one referral in the last eight months. Most of these cases involve theft, trespassing, assault or weapons charges.</p> <p>Davison’s office said that the initiative will work to coordinate the city attorney, the police department, the King County Prosecutor’s Office, King County Jail and service providers to try to enhance the outcomes for these repeat offenders while also reducing their impacts on public safety.</p> <p>The city attorney’s office will keep a list of the “high utilizers” and coordinate with its partners.</p>

The initiative comes as the city, along with many major cities across the country, saw a [dramatic spike in violent crime](#) over the last two years.

Seattle's downtown core around Third Avenue has received significant attention in recent weeks after a number of shootings, including one that left a [15-year-old dead](#), and a number of businesses closed down due to the increased criminal activity.

Seattle police have since moved in a mobile precinct to the area around Third Avenue and Pike Street as part of its Operation New Day, but questions around making a sustainable change persist, with Mayor Bruce Harrell saying he hopes to bring a sense of justice to the city while also getting help for those experiencing drug addiction and homelessness.

Davison says her new program will help in this effort by making sure repeat offenders have access to certain programs in coordination with service providers and public safety partners.

"I am committed to rebuilding our City's accountability system. Through our High Utilizer Initiative, we will directly address the individuals who create a disproportionate impact on public safety in Seattle," Davison said. "High-utilizers have fallen through the cracks of our social safety net and criminal justice system and cannot be ignored. My office will prioritize these cases and continue to advocate for both accountability and behavioral health and substance use interventions to help stop the cycle of addiction, crime, and human suffering we are seeing on our streets."

Interim Chief Adrian Diaz with the Seattle Police Department said in a statement that much of the repeat criminal activity throughout the city is perpetrated by a small number of people, something he's said before in addressing public safety.

As for the [significant increase in violent crime](#), Seattle has already seen 118 shootings and shots fired incidents through the first two months of 2022, according to police [data](#). That's nearly double the number compared to last year and nearly 50 more than 2015, which saw the next highest on record at 70 through the first two months of the year.

According to Diaz, violent crime increased overall by 20% from 2020 to 2021.

In a statement Tuesday, Diaz said, "I am confident the High Utilizer Initiative will not only add another layer of accountability but will also help identify those most in need of behavioral and health services."

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Yakima: 2 teens shot outside high school</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/police-two-teens-shot-outside-high-school-in-yakima/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/police-two-teens-shot-outside-high-school-in-yakima/</a>
GIST	<p>YAKIMA, Wash. (AP) — Authorities say two teens were hurt in a shooting outside a high school in Yakima, Washington.</p> <p>Yakima Police Chief Matt Murray said an 18-year-old is in serious condition and a 16-year-old is in critical condition after shots were fired in a parking lot altercation around 3 p.m. Tuesday.</p> <p>Both victims are students at the high school, and incident appears to be gang related, he said.</p> <p>The Yakima Herald-Republic reports police are looking for two suspects.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 PCSO: 2 deputies shot, suspect dead</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article259443599.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article259443599.html</a>
GIST	Two Pierce County sheriff's deputies who were shot serving a warrant Tuesday are both fathers who have dedicated their lives to public service.

More than 150 law enforcement officers gathered at St. Joseph Medical Center in Tacoma, where the deputies were taken after exchanging gunfire with a convicted felon outside a mobile home in Spanaway. Officers from other agencies patrolled county roads so deputies could be with their injured colleagues.

“These are guys who have a heart for public service,” Sheriff Ed Troyer said. “It’s a tragedy all the way around.”

One deputy underwent surgery Tuesday and is expected to survive. He remains in serious condition and will be kept hospitalized for up to a week. The other deputy is gravely injured, and doctors have warned his loved ones to prepare for the worst.

The gravely injured deputy is Dominique “Dom” Calata, 35, who has been with the Sheriff’s Department for 6-1/2 years. He is assigned to the Edgewood detachment. Before that, Calata served five years in the U.S. Army and is currently in the National Guard. He graduated from Pacific Lutheran University, is married and has a 4-year-old son.

The seriously injured deputy is Rich Scaniffe, 45, who has been with the department for 21 years. He is a patrol sergeant assigned to the Mountain detachment and commander of the SWAT team. Scaniffe is married and has a daughter in elementary school, officials said.

The deputies are part of the sheriff’s SWAT team, which was requested by the South Sound Gang Task Force to help serve a warrant to a 40-year-old man wanted for second-degree assault. The man, who police said has prior felony convictions, was believed to be a candidate for the three strikes law. That means he would have faced life in prison if convicted of another crime.

“We knew he was dangerous” and that’s why SWAT handled the operation, Troyer said.

Details about what led up to the shooting have not been released. The Pierce County Force Investigation Team is in charge of the investigation. A Tacoma police spokeswoman said shots were exchanged between the SWAT team and suspect, who was killed in the shootout.

He has not been publicly identified. Calata is a “big-hearted and a great guy who got in the job for the right reasons,” Troyer said. “Someone who always stepped up.”

This is the first time someone in the department has been shot since Troyer became sheriff, but he estimated a dozen or so local law enforcement officers have been shot during his law enforcement career.

Nine Pierce County sheriff’s deputies have been killed in the line duty, according to department records. Four of those were shootings.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/14 Teen in 1997 mass killing resented</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/1-of-2-teens-who-killed-bellevue-family-in-1997-resentenced-given-chance-for-meaningful-life-outside-prison/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/1-of-2-teens-who-killed-bellevue-family-in-1997-resentenced-given-chance-for-meaningful-life-outside-prison/</a>
GIST	<p>For nearly 20 years, David Anderson maintained his innocence, claiming he had been wrongly convicted of killing four members of a Bellevue family in January 1997, just two months shy of his 18th birthday.</p> <p>In separate trials in King County Superior Court, Anderson and his friend, Alex Baranyi, who was also 17 at the time of the killings, were each convicted of four counts of aggravated first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of release for the deaths of William and Rose Wilson and their daughters, Kimberly and Julia.</p> <p>At the time they were sentenced — Baranyi in January 1999 and Anderson in January 2000 — adults convicted of aggravated first-degree murder could face the death penalty but the only possible punishment for juveniles was life in prison.</p>

That's changed, though, over the past decade, starting with a 2012 U.S. Supreme Court decision that prohibited life sentences for juveniles, and culminating in a recent state Supreme Court decision that bars de facto life sentences and requires that juveniles have the chance for a "meaningful life" outside of prison.

In 2016, Anderson acknowledged his guilt in the killing of his former classmate, 20-year-old Kimberly Wilson, at a Bellevue park, and then killing her parents and younger sister inside their home in Bellevue's Woodridge neighborhood. Prosecutors argued it was a tactical decision on Anderson's part to do so.

After hearing testimony over two days in late February, King County Superior Court Judge Michael Scott on Friday resentenced Anderson to serve a minimum of 33 years behind bars, which means Anderson will become eligible for release in another eight years, according to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

Prosecutors had asked Scott to sentence Anderson to 45 years in prison while his defense attorney requested a low-end sentence of 25 years, court records show.

The state's Indeterminate Sentencing Review Board will ultimately decide whether to release Anderson after he's served 33 years, but he cannot legally be held in custody for more than 45 years, said Casey McNerthney, a spokesman for Prosecutor Dan Satterberg. The board can also impose up to three years of community supervision, the state's version of parole.

Several of the Wilson family's relatives and friends submitted victim impact statements to Scott, detailing the heart-wrenching loss and trauma they suffered as a result of the murders, but they declined to comment Monday.

Anderson's mother also declined to comment, and his defense attorney, David Montes, did not immediately respond to an email and voice message Monday seeking comment about Anderson's new sentence.

In an emailed statement, Satterberg said the Wilson family was killed "for no rational reason" and their murders rank among the worst crimes ever committed in King County.

"When you see the gruesome details of this case — the calculated, senseless slaughter of family members just for the thrill of it — you can never get those horrific images out of your mind," Satterberg wrote. "When we prosecuted this case, the court was well aware that David Anderson was 17 at the time, and that he purposefully killed the entire family before his 18th birthday to avoid more serious punishment. I understand that the law has changed, but the life sentence that had been originally imposed was the right sentence, in my opinion."

Anderson, 43, is now incarcerated at the Monroe Correctional Complex while Baranyi, 42, is serving his sentence at the Clallam Bay Corrections Center, according to the state Department of Corrections.

Though Baranyi can also file a petition with the court to seek a new sentence, he has not yet done so, McNerthney said.

Although the murder weapons were never found, DNA evidence — including the Wilsons' blood found on a pair of Anderson's boots — was among the evidence that led Bellevue police to arrest Baranyi and Anderson.

During the trial, Anderson's friends testified he had talked about committing murder for two years, compiled a "hit list" that included Kimberly Wilson's name, researched state law and decided to kill someone before his 18th birthday because he knew as a juvenile his punishment would be more lenient than that faced by an adult, according to the state's resentencing memo filed in February.

Around 10:30 p.m. on Jan. 3, 1997, Anderson borrowed his girlfriend's pickup, picked up Baranyi and dropped him off at Woodridge Water Tower Park, a small neighborhood park in Bellevue, the memo says. Anderson then picked up Kimberly Wilson from her house nearby and returned to the park, where Baranyi strangled her from behind with a rope as Anderson beat and stomped her to death.

Anderson and Baranyi then went to the Wilsons' house to eliminate witnesses because Kimberly Wilson's parents and sister knew she had left the house with Anderson that night, the memo says. They entered through an unlocked door and repeatedly stabbed William and Rose Wilson, ages 52 and 46, with knives and bludgeoned them with a baseball bat as the couple were asleep in bed, the memo says.

Julia Wilson, 17, had been studying for a chemistry test in her pajamas when she was repeatedly stabbed and bludgeoned, the memo says.

After children found Kimberly Wilson's body at the park, police went to the family's residence, where they discovered the bodies of her parents and sister.

In 2016, prosecutors say Anderson "made the tactical decision to acknowledge his guilt" to take advantage of a 2012 U.S. Supreme Court decision, [known as the Miller decision](#), that determined the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishments precludes mandatory life sentences for juvenile offenders.

Miller, which did not categorically bar life sentences, found that juveniles are not as criminally culpable as adults and have a greater capacity to change, so required judges to consider as mitigating factors youth and its attendant characteristics, such as impulsivity, failure to appreciate risks or consequences and susceptibility to familial or peer pressure.

In September, a state Supreme Court decision went a step further, prohibiting de facto life sentences for juveniles convicted of murder in the case of [Timothy Haag, who was 17 in 1994](#) when he killed his friend's 7-year-old sister in Longview, Cowlitz County.

Haag had originally been sentenced to life in prison but was resentenced under the Miller decision to 46 years in prison, a sentence he then appealed.

The justices vacated that sentence, ruling the punishment focused more on retribution than rehabilitation. Releasing Haag from prison at age 63 "deprives him of a meaningful opportunity to return to society, depriving him of a meaningful life," the majority opinion says.

Because of the ruling in Haag, King County prosecutors were legally constrained from seeking a new sentence of 46 years or longer in Anderson's case.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Mexico deports border gang leader to US</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexcio-deports-border-gang-leader-shooting-83461632">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/mexcio-deports-border-gang-leader-shooting-83461632</a>
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Mexico deported the alleged leader of a bloodthirsty gang of border hitmen Tuesday, one day after his arrest caused retaliatory shooting and burnings that closed U.S. border crossings and a U.S. consulate.</p> <p>Ricardo Mejia, Mexico's assistant secretary of public safety, said suspected drug gang leader Juan Gerardo Treviño was in fact a U.S. citizen and not a Mexican, and said he was deported.</p> <p>If he had Mexican citizenship, he would have been subject to a lengthy extradition process, but Mejia said Treviño had no Mexican identity documents nor any record of them. It is not uncommon for Mexican families on the border try to have their children's birth registered in the U.S., but they usually claim dual citizenship.</p>



After his arrest Sunday, members of Treviño's gang shot up the border city of Nuevo Laredo, and even hit the U.S. consulate with gunfire. The consulate was closed until further notice and two U.S. border bridges leading to Laredo, Texas, were briefly closed because of the incident.

U.S. Ambassador Ken Salazar said in a statement Monday that "I have raised our grave concerns about these incidents and the safety and security of our employees directly with the government of Mexico."

Treviño was handed over to U.S. at a border bridge in Tijuana, far to the west of Nuevo Laredo, presumably to avoid attempts to free him.

The Mexican army said he was the leader of an extremely violent and heavily armed gang of cartel gunmen known as "The Troops of Hell." That gang is a faction of the Northeast Cartel, the successor group to the old Zetas Cartel.

Treviño is reportedly the nephew of Miguel Angel Treviño, the imprisoned former leader of the Zetas.

The cartel has participated in some of the bloodiest, most tenacious turf battles in Mexico, attacking both Mexican law enforcement personnel and the rival Gulf cartel.

In 2019, gunmen from the Northeast staged a massive gunbattle in another border state, Coahuila, that killed 24 people. The drug cartel killed four state police officers, a local firefighter and an employee of the town's public works department in the small town of Villa Union. A total of 18 suspected gunmen also died in the confrontations.

Treviño, who reportedly had two illegal guns when he was detained, faces charges of extortion, homicide and terrorism in Mexico. He was wanted for extradition to the U.S. on charges of conspiracy to traffic drugs and launder money.

The army said armored trucks and a helicopter were used to arrest Treviño.

The gunfire in Nuevo Laredo erupted late Sunday after his arrest, when his cartel members opened fire and hijacked and burned vehicles.

The Mexican army said there had been 13 street and highway blockades in Nuevo Laredo, many apparently formed by burning vehicles.

U.S Customs and Border Protection said that southbound traffic from Laredo into Nuevo Laredo at the Juarez-Lincoln and Gateway to the Americas bridges was suspended, but reopened early Monday.

The U.S. consulate in Nuevo Laredo was closed to the public and existing appointments were to be rescheduled.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Haiti health workers strike over kidnappings</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/haitis-health-professionals-strike-kidnappings-83459760">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/haitis-health-professionals-strike-kidnappings-83459760</a>
GIST	<p>PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Thousands of doctors, nurses and other health professionals across Haiti have gone on strike to protest a spike in gang-related kidnappings as supporters burned tires and blocked roads on Tuesday.</p> <p>The three-day strike that began on Monday shut down public and private health institutions in the capital of Port-au-Prince and beyond, with only emergency rooms accepting patients.</p> <p>"We are living a catastrophic situation where no one is protected," said Dr. Louis Gerald Gilles, who closed his private practice on Tuesday in the neighborhood of Delmas to protest the recent kidnappings of two doctors. "No professional is protected. Today it could be a doctor, tomorrow they could enter the office of a lawyer or an architect."</p>

Kidnappings in Haiti increased 180% in the past year, with 655 of them reported to police, according to mid-February report by the United Nations Security Council. Authorities believe the number is much higher since many kidnappings go unreported.

“No social group was spared; among the victims were laborers, traders, religious leaders, professors, medical doctors, journalists, human rights defenders and foreign citizens,” the report stated.

The most recent kidnappings of two doctors spooked the staff at Port-au-Prince’s General Hospital, where union workers gathered on Tuesday and said conditions had become increasingly dysfunctional since the July 7 killing of President Jovenel Moïse.

They accused the administration of Prime Minister Ariel Henry of not releasing sorely needed funds to the Ministry of Health for basic services, adding that they were worried about the lack of security.

“They can walk in here, grab anyone and leave with no worry,” said Guerline Jean-Louis, a 44-year-old hospital janitor who joined the strike. “This is why we support the movement.”

Officials with Haiti’s Ministry of Health could not be immediately reached for comment.

Some patients, including Mario Fleurimon, a 39-year-old primary school teacher, were unaware of the strike.

On Tuesday, he strode into a medical complex that was empty except for a lone security guard. While frustrated he was unable to see a doctor for his diabetes, he said he supported the strike.

“There should be a general rising up to fight the insecurity,” he said.

In a recent statement, Haiti’s Medical Association demanded that the government push to have the doctors released without conditions and implement measures to “stop the wave of insecurity that strips us of our fundamental freedom to go freely about our lives.”

One of the doctors was released on Tuesday, although the conditions of his release were not immediately known.

The prime minister has pledged to crack down on the spike in gang violence and kidnappings, with the U.S. and other countries pledging resources and training to help an understaffed, underfunded police force.

The strike by health professionals is scheduled to end on Wednesday, while another strike by the Association of Owners and Drivers in Haiti was expected to start on Thursday to protest theft of vehicles in the community of Martissant, ground zero for warring gangs who have kidnapped or killed several civilians, many of them aboard public buses.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Mexico: journalist killed; 8<sup>th</sup> this year</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/journalist-killed-mexico-eighth-year-83471057">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/journalist-killed-mexico-eighth-year-83471057</a>
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY -- Another journalist was shot to death in Mexico on Tuesday, the eighth murdered so far this year in an unprecedented spate of killings that has made Mexico the most dangerous place in the world for the press.</p> <p>Reporters and photographers have been murdered this year in Mexico at the rate of almost one a week, despite claims from the government that the situation is under control.</p> <p>Prosecutors in the western state of Michoacan said reporter Armando Linares was shot to death at a home in the town of Zitacuaro. His killing came six weeks after the slaying of a colleague, Roberto Toledo, from</p>

the same outlet Monitor Michoacan. It was Linares who announced Toledo's death Jan. 31 in a video posted to social media.

Zitacuaro is one of the closest towns to the monarch butterfly wintering grounds in the mountains west of Mexico City.

The area has been plagued by illegal logging and drug gangs, local governance disputes and deforestation linked to expanding avocado production. Logging has damaged the pine and fir forests where the butterflies spend the winter after migrating from the United States and Canada.

Linares served as director at the Monitor Michoacan website, which on Tuesday continued to show an article he had written about a cultural festival celebrating monarch butterflies.

There was no immediate information on a possible motive in the killing.

Toledo, a camera operator and video editor for Monitor Michoacan, was shot Jan. 31 as he prepared for an interview in Zitacuaro.

At the time of Toledo's death, Linares told The Associated Press he had received several death threats after enrolling in a government journalist protection program.

Asked who he thought was behind the threats, Linares said "they pass themselves off as an armed group, they pass themselves off as a criminal gang. We can't verify whether it is true or not that they are this armed gang."

Criminals in Mexico often claim they are part of a drug cartel in order to instill fear in their victims, whether or not they really are.

"We have organized crime, just like in the rest of the country, and Monitor worked on a lot of issues like illegal logging, given that we are near the monarch reserve," Linares said in early February. "We wrote a lot about illegal logging and also a lot of issues like corruption in the municipal government."

Drug cartels in Mexico often make money by protecting illegal logging, or extorting protection payments from avocado growers.

"The nightmare continues for the press in Mexico," the press group Reporters Without Borders wrote in its social media accounts.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has reacted angrily to worldwide criticism of the killings.

In February, López Obrador said U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was misinformed, after Blinken wrote "I join those calling for greater accountability and protections for Mexican journalists."

López Obrador claims the government is investigating all of the killings and suggested Blinken received bad information from other U.S. agencies, mentioning the CIA, FBI and Drug Enforcement Administration.

"They're tricking him," he said. "We don't tolerate the impunity of anyone."

And last week, López Obrador issued an irate response to European Parliament criticism of journalist killings in Mexico, accusing the Europeans of having a "colonialist mentality."

The Mexican president criticized EU support for Ukraine, and called European Parliament members "sheep."

“It is unfortunate that you vote like sheep to join the reactionary and coup-mongering strategy of the corrupt group opposed to the Fourth Transformation,” as López Obrador calls his administration, he wrote in an open letter to the parliament.

The EU Parliament approved a resolution last Thursday urging López Obrador to stop his harsh verbal attacks on reporters who criticize him, and ensure their safety.

Press groups say López Obrador’s daily criticisms of journalists, whom he calls “conservatives” and “mercenaries,” make them more vulnerable to violence.

In February, the Inter American Press Association called on the president to “immediately suspend the aggressions and insults, because such attacks from the top of power encourage violence against the press.”

The EU resolution “calls on the authorities, and in particular the highest ones, to refrain from issuing any communication which could stigmatize human rights defenders, journalists and media workers, exacerbate the atmosphere against them or distort their lines of investigation.”

Journalists are often the targets of Mexico’s drug cartels, which seek to intimidate and manipulate coverage of their activities and their rivals. Local politicians and government officials are also frequently linked to murders, according to the government, which has acknowledged that impunity in those killings runs above 90%.

In early March, gunmen killed Juan Carlos Muñiz, who covered crime for the online news site Testigo Minero in the state of Zacatecas.

Jorge Camero, the director of an online news site who was until recently a municipal worker in the northern state of Sonora, was killed in late February.

In early February, Heber López, director of the online news site Noticias Web, was shot to death in the southern state of Oaxaca.

Reporter Lourdes Maldonado López was found shot to death inside her car in Tijuana on Jan. 23.

Crime photographer Margarito Martínez was gunned down outside his Tijuana home on Jan. 17.

Reporter José Luis Gamboa was killed in the Gulf coast state of Veracruz on Jan. 10.

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HEADLINE	<b>03/15 Arrest: suspect stalking, killing homeless</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/police-arrest-man-suspected-stalking-killing-homeless-83451815">https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/police-arrest-man-suspected-stalking-killing-homeless-83451815</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- A man suspected of stalking and shooting homeless people asleep on the streets of New York City and Washington was arrested early Tuesday. Police said at least two people were killed and three others wounded in the attacks.</p> <p>The suspect, Gerald Brevard was arrested in Washington on murder, assault and other charges after news of the killings had added new fears to people spending nights on the streets of the two cities and elsewhere.</p> <p>The 30-year-old man, who lives in the Washington area, was charged Tuesday only in connection with the Washington cases and has not been charged in the New York attacks. Brevard has a criminal history that includes assaulting a police officer and assault with a deadly weapon and was in custody Tuesday. He was being questioned by both New York and Washington detectives.</p> <p>Police in the two cities earlier released multiple surveillance photographs, including a closeup showing the suspect's face that was obtained from an ATM surveillance camera in Washington, and urged people who</p>

might know him to come forward. Investigators used ballistic evidence and tips to help link the shootings, and a tipster called police with information about the suspect's identity, officials said.

Police are now contacting other cities to determine whether or not the suspect might be responsible for attacks elsewhere. Though he hasn't been charged yet in the New York cases, police feel "very confident" they have identified the correct suspect, Metropolitan Police Chief Robert Contee said.

All of the shootings involved .22-caliber bullets, and surveillance photos and video, along with witness statements, all pointed to a single suspect — a man wearing distinctive sneakers, black pants and the same face mask, New York Police Department Chief of Detectives James Essig told reporters.

Police on Tuesday identified the Washington victim who died as 54-year-old Morgan Holmes. The New York victim was not identified.

New York detectives were in Washington and participating in interviews with the suspect, Essig said. But investigators did not immediately find anything further connecting the suspect to New York beyond surveillance video and ballistics evidence or any social media postings or other evidence explaining a motive.

Brevard hasn't offered any inkling of a motive during interviews with detectives, and authorities believe he may have been randomly targeting the victims, Contee said.

D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser and New York City Mayor Eric Adams credited the swift coordination between the two police departments and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. ATF agents took Brevard into custody around 2:30 a.m. Tuesday morning before handing him over to detectives in Washington. They have not yet recovered a gun.

"This man targeted those experiencing homelessness with no regard for life, but this criminal is now off the streets," Adams said Tuesday. "Gun violence against anyone, let alone our most vulnerable populations, is sick, but thanks to the coordination between different levels of law enforcement and the public's help, those experiencing homelessness can breathe a sigh of relief today."

Court records show Brevard was arrested in July 2018 on assault charges and later pleaded guilty to attempted assault with a deadly weapon. He was found mentally incompetent to stand trial in June 2019. Records show Brevard was sent to St. Elizabeths Hospital, a psychiatric facility in the District. A month later, he was deemed competent to stand trial. Soon after, records show, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a year in prison. That sentence, however, was suspended.

Investigators also are trying to determine why Brevard was out on the streets around 2:30 a.m., when he was arrested.

Advocates for the homeless found comfort in the arrest but urged officials in both cities, which have significant populations of people without permanent shelter, to provide more assistance.

"The urgency of helping people move in off the streets must remain, because this is only the latest example of the risks faced by people without housing," said Jacquelyn Simone, policy director for the Coalition for the Homeless in New York City. "It's not the first time that people have been the victims of violence or even homicides because of their housing status."

Investigators in the two cities began to suspect a link between the shootings on Sunday after a Metropolitan Police Department homicide captain, a former New York City resident, saw surveillance photos that had been released on Saturday night by the New York Police Department while scrolling through social media.

The man in those photos looked similar to the one being sought by the MPD homicide captain's own department. Contee credited the coordination between the departments for the timely arrest.

The earliest known shooting happened at around 4 a.m. on March 3 in Washington, police said, when a man was wounded in the city's Northeast section. A second man was wounded on March 8, just before 1:30 a.m.

At 3 a.m. the next day, police and firefighters found Holmes dead inside a burning tent. He initially was thought to have suffered fatal burns, but an autopsy revealed he had died of multiple stab and gunshot wounds.

The killer then traveled north to New York City, police said. Surveillance video showed a man who investigators believe is Brevard at Penn Station in Manhattan around 3:30 a.m.

An hour later, a 38-year-old man sleeping on the street in Manhattan not far from the entrance to the Holland Tunnel was shot in his right arm as he slept. The victim screamed, and the gunman fled, police said.

About 90 minutes later, the gunman fatally shot another man in SoHo, police said.

"He looked around," Adams said. "He made sure no one was there. And he intentionally took the life of an innocent person."

The man's body was found in his sleeping bag just before 5 p.m. Saturday. He had been shot in the head and neck, said Julie Bolcer, a spokesperson for the New York City medical examiner's office.

The victim had lain in the street for hours before authorities were summoned.

Police believe Brevard quickly returned to Washington, D.C. after the attacks.

Kess Abraham, who became homeless last month, said he was "pained" to learn of "a guy who lived on the streets who probably was minding his own business getting murdered for no reason."

It could have been "any one of us who's homeless," Abraham said.

The latest attacks were reminiscent of the beating deaths of four homeless men as they slept on the streets in New York's Chinatown in the fall of 2019. Another homeless man, Randy Santos, has pleaded not guilty to murder charges in those attacks. A year ago, four people were stabbed in New York City, two fatally, by a man who attacked homeless people in the subway system. That accused assailant, who also was homeless, is awaiting trial.

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